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IN THE SILVER AGE.

VOL. II.

Edinburgh: Printed by Ballantyne & Company.





Vol. 2.

A Bit of Sunshine.





IN THE SILVER AGE:

“*Essays*—

“THAT IS, DISPERSED MEDITATIONS.”

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF “MAUDE TALBOT,” “SYLVAN HOLT’S DAUGHTER,”

“KATHIE BRANDE,” ETC.

“When any one says to me, I think so and so,—I like to say to them, When did you think it, where did you think it, how did you think it, and to whom did you talk about it?”—*Commonplace Philosopher*.

IN TWO VOLS.

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RIVER SCENERY.

“ A work divine,
A blending of all beauties ; streams and dells,
Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, corn-field, mountain, vine.”
BYRON.





I.

HEIDELBERG.

I HAVE worked task-work, and have the rest of the day to myself," says Charles Lamb, going home pensioned and exultant, at the close of his six-and-thirty years labour. His long-coveted freedom was delicious while it was new, but I think it bored him by and by, and that a spell of writing at the old desk would have been now and then as much a treat to him as was ever a day's *outing* during the years of his clerkly bondage.

But no such tedium, no such regret, no such surfeit of leisure as overtook him are likely to overtake me in my holiday ; for I can see the limits of it, and the next morning rising soberly on the morning's work. Nevertheless, though to-morrow be full in sight, I can take my ease and my pleasure in idleness to-day ; for I have earned a right

to be idle and to please myself a little while. I have a companion who is in delicate health, but who has no fidgety curiosity. We are travelling together with the object pure and simple of making holiday, and as this is the first genuine holiday tour of my life, those who know what work means may imagine how I am prepared to enjoy it. We are agreed that it shall not degenerate into a toil of a pleasure, and not being emulous of doing wonders like some who have gone before us, we just lounge leisurely after our own devices and find quiet satisfaction in them.

A solitary pilgrimage has its charms, but if you go double, your friend must either suit you to the core or become speedily a thorn in the flesh. Two are enough for good company, and, according to my experience, two who have known each other from youth upwards, and are grinding on in the same mill still, are the very best of good company. There are weaknesses that by long acquaintance grow dearer and more precious than sterling virtues; and those whose quips and cranks of character we know as intimately as they know ours, have that ease of familiarity without which companionship is sufferance and not enjoyment. It is clear June

weather, sunny but cool, and fortune is favouring us in every way, answering our cordial expectations with perpetual smiles; or if she puts on an occasional frown for diversity's sake, it will disperse soon, and when I open my picture-book of memorials at home, every scene will reappear bathed in pleasantness and serenity.

Has anybody ever noticed that the country is stiller on Sunday morning than on other days, or is it but one more vagary of mine that all creation keeps the Sabbath holiday as reverently as good Christian people do?

From the terrace of the Castle yesterday it seemed as if the whole valley beneath were at prayers. The Neckar ran its swift shallow course under the bridge, rippling and glistening in a pure splendour of sunshine; and where the country opened out into wide, rich levels, stretching to a dim, sinuous line of far-away mountains, the very spirit of languor and repose breathed through the warm distance, and rested upon it like soft, out-stretched wings of golden haze.

Below us the trees, in every tint of youth and hoariness, rolled a billow of verdure steep beyond

steep down to the hill-foot ; behind rose the ruined Castle, graceful in ruin, with the summer woods growing up to its very walls, as if to shield its decay from every wind of Heaven. Winds of adverse fortune have beaten on it rudely enough ; no more palace of sovereigns ; no more stronghold of tyrannical or cruel men, but a museum of curiosities, a haunt of holiday-travellers and holiday-students. We strayed through its ancient rooms two days ago, and saw its heavy portraits of an extinct princedom, its toys, trinkets, and weapons of war ; saw also an uncurtained nightmare of a martyrdom which has thrust itself between my eyes and nature's holy face at many a sudden and unwelcome moment since.

This valley of the Neckar is not describable by mere picturesque phrases ; it is *lovable* in its gracious and tender beauty beyond any scenery that I ever beheld. Heidelberg itself is very pleasant : a cheerful air pervades its streets ; the people are courteous, simple, and kindly. It must be an agreeable place to live in ; if I were a lad I should like to be sent to its university, and to be one of those merry, gay, rather dandified students who give it its lightsome character. They are said to

be fond of beer and duelling, and one face we have met which certainly bears tokens of such savage affray as have for ever spoilt its comeliness. A tendency to queer pets also manifests itself here, as in similar communities elsewhere. One cluster of youths who were parading the Castle grounds yesterday had an obstinate little fox in a string, which refused to see the propriety of going whither it was led, and broke the delicious, dreamy quiet by yelping a shrill remonstrance to all its master's coaxing exhortations. Ugly dogs also are numerous, but I trust they are better than they look, and that the depravity of their countenance is not a true index to a life of rats and chronic dissipation. The poor, laborious student is not so frequent in the town as might have been anticipated from the cheapness of education here ; but I think we have met his type more than once taking a walk by the river in the evening, and haranguing loudly to himself in lonely places ; and no sweeter solitude could man have for his visionary triumphs and applause of echoes.

Our Inn is close by the river and the bridge ; a cleanly, well-served, old-fashioned place, where we are made comfortable in a homely way at very moderate charges. The air of the valley is most

exhilarating ; the temperature delicious in the early and later hours of the day ; but at noon the sun has great power, and it is hotter on the river than on land, as we have had the opportunity of testing in the course of an excursion to Niegergemund and Niegersteiner.

Our road lay on the left bank of the river under the Castle Hill, where a double avenue of noble walnut-trees spreads a perfumed and pleasant shadow on the green way-side. Anything more charming than the windings of the valley in the strong light and shade of morning is hardly conceivable. The hills varied their form and colouring continually ; here they were terraced in vineyards, there clothed with waving woods, again bare, shewing red ribs of stone. In the gentle depressions between them we caught sweet glimpses of other lateral valleys closed in with blue lines of mountain or forest distance ; church spires and villages nestled in their rich hollows, and everywhere luxuriance, beauty, and seclusion. We passed one long, low white house in a lovely nook, which is a convent ; its many windows look to the river and the opposite hills, and there is an air of greenness and pleasantness about it that suggest how a summer-time

might be spent there in great enjoyment, a life-time perhaps without much discontent.

The carriage-road runs close along by the river, and nearly everywhere parallel with it is the railway now in process of construction. Great gangs of labourers were at work, quarrying stone in the steep hill-sides—some so high up they looked like men in miniature, or huge blue flies clinging to a wall ; while others below were hewing it into blocks for building. The scene was busy as a hive of bees, but the labourers appeared in bulk, stature, and power of work greatly inferior to the same race that we see on our lines at home. Indeed, nowhere abroad have we yet met amongst the peasantry the freshness and glow of health which make so ruddy and pleasant young English rustic faces ; and in the Neckar valley very many of them must be either extremely poor or altogether lacking in thrift and cleverness—the first, I should imagine for everywhere the land is cultivated to a fine point of perfection, and made to yield its utmost, though the carts and other agricultural machines that have come under our casual observation are of the rudest and most primitive construction, and the misery of the horses would touch the heart of a stone. There

is something to my feelings almost more pitiful in a starved, dejected beast than in a starved, dejected Christian ; the ribs of some of these patient animals are visible as lattice-work through their dull skins ; I believe an anatomist with a lively imagination might see their internal machinery at work as they pull.

In carrying out the plan of the railway, the beauty of the valley has been respected ; the line will leave the banks of the Neckar, with their double rows of shady trees, free to traveller and tourist. What true lover of nature could be content to see it by a swift flight along the iron-road ? It only reveals its loveliness to those who seek. I should like to pass all the long days of a year here in and out amongst its glens and woods, its fields and hills.

At Niegergemund we crossed the river on a singularly rude species of raft, which was worked over the stream by machinery, the horses of the carriage being in no way secured but standing at ease, the driver keeping his place and we ours. From the right bank the views were equally delightful and picturesque. At one curve of the road we came in sight of a mound-like, circular

hill, on the summit of which is a fortified village; above the walls we could just descry the roofs of houses and the church—a jealously guarded and mortified place with blind eyes in the midst of some of the loveliest scenery in the world. Almost overhead, and hanging apparently on the verge of the red precipice, like some huge nest of extinct bird, were the ivy-draped ruins of an ancient tower, and another ruin amongst the woods hardly a stone's-throw from it. An avenue of tall poplars cast their long phantom-like shadows upon the river, and led the way to the modern castle of Niegersteiner and the village beyond it. We left our carriage here and wandered through the town,—not a very pretty or fragrant place,—and further on up a beguiling lane, where we rested under the shade of a high hedge of arbor vitæ that enclosed a burying-ground.

We came upon it by accident; no church was near, and it had the glare and tawdriness, even in that sweet spot, that bedizen most Catholic Cemeteries; the same ranks of crosses, black and white, the same weather-beaten garlands of everlastings, tarnished shrines, and little plaster saints. And yet these poor trophies are signs of love and re-

membrance; there is a sentiment in them to respect, though the air of bustle and dustiness they impart seems to me little suggestive of rest to the dead or of true consolation to the living.

In returning towards noon we again crossed the river, where the sun, as if concentrating all its power in the depths of the valley, burnt with an intense heat overhead and reflected a scorching glare from the water. We were glad when the creaking passage was over, and when, instead of keeping along by the bank, we mounted a road high on the hill-side, where we caught many a stray breeze until we descended again to Wolfsbrenner—a spring hidden amongst woods and fields, where a summer retreat has been established for the convenience of pleasure-seekers and mineral-water drinkers. It lies concealed from the Neckar and the main valley in a soft hollow of the hills, and the little streamlet winds round the gardens of the Spa with a cheerful, prattling dreaminess. Thence we continued by another commanding road, under rich fern-draped banks and woods, to the Castle, and down by its paved and rugged descent to our Inn.



II.

THE LEGEND OF THE BROOK.

OUR last evening in this fairest of valleys we have been spending in a rambling stroll over the wooded hills towards the Convent. The sky was full of a calm lustrousness that shone in broken reflections of colour on the river ; a scarcely perceptible zephyr stirred in the trees ; a single boat with two figures in it rested rather than floated upon the water, and the monotonous cry of some bird in the sedgy shallows, repeated at almost regular intervals, had the effect of deepening the hushed and tranquil charm of the scene.

As we sauntered on our leisurely way and left the town and the bustle behind, we presently heard a strange moaning complaint, reiterated in a pathetic cadence of pain and struggle that was almost human. We listened and moved towards the sound, when we discovered that it proceeded

from a slender brook flowing down from the hills. It was dammed up by some rude contrivance of stones and forced into a narrow, under-ground channel in the direction of a group of farm-buildings, and in this manner it bewailed its irksome captivity. No more rippling under sweet ferny brakes for its sparkling silver waves, but a dull subservience henceforth to common domestic uses! If we had come that way in the moonlight, and heard its sobbing lament, we might have gone away and said the place was haunted. And haunted it is by some Ondine invisible if this quaint Legend of the Brook be true.

Long, long ago, in the days of Count Rudolph the Hardy, there glistened on the very crest of the mountains that overlook the Neckar a beautiful lakelet, set like a jewel in a king's crown. On its southern bank one of the Foresters had built his lodge, and Count Rudolph himself in his stately Castle might have coveted it for its charming situation.

Now this Forester had an only daughter, who kept his house, her mother being dead, a comely maiden, fair as the lilies of the valley and sprightly

as the roe upon the hills. Her hair was like curled flax when the beams revel in it; her cheek bloomed like the inner heart of a morning rose; her lips were full and scarlet as twin-cherries ripened next the sun; her eyes were blue as two deep pools in the purple twilight. So rare a flower, though she grew and blossomed in the wildest seclusions of the forest, had been heard of beyond it, and her beauty had smitten with a desperate love-sickness in the same fatal moment two brothers, huntsmen in Count Rudolph's service.

When they saw Gretchen first she was spinning at her wheel under a great dark pine-tree that overshadowed the lake, singing softly to herself one of the hymns to the Virgin. Carl, the elder brother, listened with sly courtesy, but Fritz shouted to make her lift her eyes from her wheel, and when she did so, paid her a compliment on her beauty which caused the rose on her cheek to blush all over her fair face.

"She is a Princess in disguise," whispered Carl, with cunning flattery.

"Let her be for that—she is a woman and a sweet one," rejoined Fritz; and then the two bold huntsmen drew near and flung themselves down to

rest on the greensward by the water under the pine-tree near her feet.

Gretchen spun on, seeming little to heed them, though she could have told every feature of each brother's face, and what was his countenance, and whose livery he wore, and even the kind of weapons in his belt. She was young and simple, yet full of shrewdness and wit, as a little mouse that lives in a crannied old house with plenty of kinsfolk.

When Carl therefore returned to his smooth speeches and said, "Gretchen, thou dost spin as deftly as the Countess's tire-woman over yonder at the Castle;" she answered him, "But the spider spinneth finer." Again when he said, "Thou canst carol a sweet hymn right sweetly for an untaught maiden;" quoth she, "The lark is untaught, yet his song goeth straight to Heaven: the nightingale is untaught, yet every wayfarer stayeth on his steps to hearken though the dark be falling." And when he praised her for being so graceful and light of limb, she retorted, "Yet can the young hind flee more craftily!"

"But the swift huntsman can stalk her and bring her down," whispered Fritz, peering into the

maiden's eyes and laughing while she blushed. Gretchen went on spinning after that, looking shyly abashed.

Before the Forester came home in the evening from his work in the woods the two brothers were gone on their way, but a few mornings after Carl again appeared and Fritz with him. There was an air of jealousy and sullen watchfulness between the pair, which Gretchen did not fail to observe. A stealthy malignity glimmered in Carl's cold eyes whenever Fritz whispered and she listened, and to vex him she looked and listened the more tenderly. Fritz had brought her a couple of young doves, and the maiden received his gift gratefully, and smiled and prattled to him while the pretty tame nestlings fed out of her hand. Then Carl regarded his brother with ill-dissembled wrath, and a fell purpose rose in his soul as Gretchen idly flirted him mocking glances out of her bright-blue globes of eyes.

That night the Forester returned from his toil wearied exceedingly, and sat down in his chimney-corner silent and with a sorrowful countenance.

"What aileth thee, my father?" Gretchen asked.

"It is an evil world," said he. "For the love of

some foolish maiden one of Count Rudolph's huntsmen hath murdered his brother. Fritz is slain, and Carl is fled—the wanton may go weep for her lover."

Gretchen's heart turned very sick, and suddenly there passed before her eyes a vision of a lonely glade in the forest, where the bold Fritz was striding along chanting a lusty stave; then appeared the uplifted hand of Carl and smote him on the forehead and slew him, as Cain secretly slew his brother Abel when they were together in the field. And she went out and hid herself under the pine tree and wept bitterly, lamenting her lightness and mockery, which had provoked the deadly feud between the kinsmen and the deadly deed.

And about moonrise she saw Carl come along by the lake and stoop over it, saying: "Water, water, wash away this stain;" but a voice amongst the reeds answered with a ghostly sob: "I dare not—it is thy brother's blood!" Then he fled away calling on the power of all evil to help him, and striking his breast in his extremity. Gretchen shuddered and counted her beads, and the fair hair rose on her scalp as the murderer returned to the Lake, having a dark shape, horned and hooded, at

his elbow. Again the huntsman stooped down and dipt his hands, saying: "Water, water, wash away this stain;" and again the spirit answered: "*I dare* not—it is thy brother's blood!" and its wail of anguish was more piercing than before.

Then the Devil taunted him and asked if he would buy lees of him to take it out. "Yes!" cried the murderer eagerly. "What is thy price?"

"A poor thing that thou hast risked to perdition already. Pledge it to me now, fully and freely, and I will cause the water wash thy hands as clean as the fair Gretchen's own;" answered Satan.

Then Carl pledged him his miserable soul, and kneeling by the pure Lake, he bathed his accusing hands in the flood, and rinsed and wrung them until the guilty witness of his wicked deed was washed out. But as he rose a troop of the Count's servants surrounded and took him, and when he called on the Tempter to befriend him, he was only mocked by a hideous peal of laughter, like a chorus of demons ringing through the forest before a storm.

"The Devil gives short shrift to his penitents, Carl; he hath bought thee and he hath sold thee;" said an old man amongst his captors; and then they led him away, and his face Gretchen beheld never

more, neither the face of Fritz, save in frightful nightmare dreams upon her restless bed.

And when they were gone a strange commotion rose in the Lake. The waters heaved and swelled tumultuously, and a weird voice came down over it on the wings of the wind, crying: "Thou hast washed out murder-stains, *thou* who wast set in the crest of the mountains like a jewel in a king's crown. Therefore wash out stains, wicked little Lake, wash out stains for ever!"

And at that the water dashed up furiously and broke its banks just at the spot where Carl and the Devil had stood, and fled away down the hills in a torrent, that it might gain the swift river in the valley and escape its punishment. But just when it reached the foot of the mountains, and was not fifty paces from the Neckar, the Miller espied it rushing down—a clear Brook amongst the white pebbles; and he caught it, and dammed it up, and turned it through a dark channel to his farm, where the cattle drank it, and the maids used it to scour, and it ran over the mill-wheel; and being past that it ground no more.

And Gretchen betook herself to the Convent in the valley, and never joy of wife or mother knew

she; but died in her maidenhood repentant. And the Spirit of the Brook bemoans its captivity by the wayside ever since its waters were a Lake and washed out murder-stains, and were caught in their flight and dammed up by the Miller.





III.

ABOUT ST GOAR.

A VINEYARD *sounds* picturesque, but in point of fact a rich meadow or a field of ripening grain is a much more beautiful object. The steep, stiffly-clad hills rising from the Rhine-banks struck us at first sight as hardly monotonous. They are unsusceptible of the graceful, breezy cloud-play which makes our deep pastures when the wind blows over them as changeful as the waves of the sea and as various as heaven itself. The river rolled broad, full, and leaden-hued, and the sky hung low over the hills beyond it like a curtain drawn close to shut out the glow of day which yet shone through it with a hot, coppery luridness. There was an oppressive, dusty, disheartening atmosphere over all which filled us with a vexed and silent disappointment. We were at Bingen, and sitting in our Inn window, we looked

out gloomily on the gloomy river. The railway has monopolised its margin and cut off all pleasant access to its cool waters; strolling in white burning dust is not soothing, and our discomforts made us heartily wish ourselves back again in the old city by the Neckar that we left in the morning.

But to-day broke gloriously, and the sunshine coloured all in its earlier hours with a magical lustre. The river rolled now a grand, silvered flood, and the monotonous hills were cleft into forms of grotesque beauty by the dark shadows of their own limbs and spurs. We crossed the stream and landed near the foot of the Niederwald at a little village, where my companion availed herself of the services of a willing donkey and his girl-driver for the ascent. I preferred trusting to what old-fashioned dalesfolk call Shank's Nag, and marched on with the guide *in* advance up a winding road and a rugged footpath, which was encumbered with loose stones like the bed of a mountain torrent.

The highest level of the Niederwald waved with barley, over which the sun shone with a transparent glow. The same degree of heat at home I should have felt insufferably exhausting, but the delicious

pure air poured such *verve* and elasticity into every nerve and vein that fatigue fell from me unheeded. When we entered the woods it was to be led through pleasant glades to various points of view—thence we beheld the Rhine scenery in its glory; hill beyond hill, soft in amber mist; steep upon steep like cloud upon cloud, and the river rolling majestically between.

One thing only we found to deplore—that we had not our baggage at the little Inn on the mountain-top instead of at Bingen, dustily imprisoned behind the iron-road below. To be there without guide or donkey or donkey-girl would be a most enjoyable adventure. We made many vows to ourselves if ever we travel that way again; but meanwhile, having duly mounted the tower, and groped through the cavern, and taken a brief survey of the hill-world around, and been cheated by a vagrant strawberry girl, it behoved us to descend the mountain, which we did by a broiling, exposed road through green vineyards down to Rudesheim; and this evening we came on to St Goar.

It was towards dusk when we reached this spot, and a strain of wonderful aerial music was the first sound that greeted us. It seemed to come from

mountains in the mist or far-away solitudes in the upper clouds. Its mystical sweetness words cannot express—what words can interpret a sound? It was the echo of the Lurleyberg, which repeated so exquisitely the short strains of a bugle on the opposite bank of the river. Later in the evening a musket awoke notes of thunder, which rolled and reverberated amongst the hills. If the railway-whistle ever awaken this echo, what a weird demon-song will it bear into the mysterious spheres of the higher world? Imagine the spectral huntsmen on the mountains hearing it for the first time, and winding their horns in defiant reply; the fifteen voices taking up the alarm and repeating it in shrieking surprise to the astonished solitudes!

It is night now and moonlight. Home and task-work seem a long way off. The time when I left them has fallen back into a quite distant past. It is pleasant enough to be free for a while, but I should not choose to be wandering always, or even to have a very elastic tether. I like to feel some pull on me now and then, when my imagination soars away on eccentric flights after unattainable enjoyments.

I chanced lately on a passage in an Essay by a lady of English blood and French breeding which embodied so many of my own unexpressed sentiments on this head, that I was charmed by its cheerful truth, and made immediate application of it. She says: "Si l'on perd la danse à trente ans, on acquiert la liberté. Heureux ceux qui font durer pendant quarante ans ce crépuscule qui separe la dernière jeunesse de la première vieillesse ! car c'est *l'âge d'argent*, pendant lequel on fait tout ce qu'on veut, et l'on dit ce qu'on pense." The Silver Age! Has it not a ring of sterling pleasantness, and is it not appropriate often, notwithstanding all the dissatisfied maunderings we have lately heard touching the tedium of middle-life?

Madame de Tracy had herself the art of growing old gracefully. When her children were married and settled in homes away from hers, she betook herself to a labour in which perhaps few women will feel a disposition to imitate her; but a personal interest commended it to her liking, and she had the courage and the wisdom to adopt it. A desire to know what the Fathers of the Church had written on the immortality of the soul and the re-union of the spirits of the dead hereafter, led her to the

study of their works, and from the simple study to the translation. "J'ai organisé mon travail, et je suis décidée à traduire tout de bon le livre des *Offices* de Saint Ambroise," she tells us, and then goes on to speak of the charm of seeing before her a multitude of great volumes which she shall never have time to read to the end.

Most of us cherish the idea of accomplishing our set task, and even of reaping its results, but not so Madame de Tracy. She is content to gather from each day the fruits of her toil, and to let the future take care of itself; she is happy in her own way, and will not die before her hour by refusing the interests and pleasures appropriate to each stage of life. The old age of indolent women she compares to the hell of Dante, at the gate of which all hope is left behind. How far she advanced with her great work I know not; it was a vast ambition and beyond her strength; others, more learned than she, have attempted it and fallen short by the way.

Madame de Tracy looks forth from her "*Essaies*" wisely capricious and charmingly individual. She lives and writes in a sunny atmosphere. In her youth joyous, in her Silver Age silvery, to the last true and very much herself. She is worthy to be

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cited as an example in disproof of the popular idea that the afternoon of a somewhat lonely life must needs be dull and gray, and that the only pleasures worth accepting are the pleasures that pass away with youth.





IV.

THE VALLEY OF THE MILLS.

FROM the river the Lurleyberg at one point bears the appearance of a colossal head, and the Seven Sister rocks in mid-channel cause the waters to run with a rapid, swirling current under its broad black shadow, past the little town of St Goar and the famous Castle of Rheinfels.

Last night we wandered up the steep road bordered by great walnut trees, and turning into a little enclosed pasture adjoining the ruins, sat down on the dry grass to enjoy the balmy purple twilight, and the rich sweep of river, hill, and valley that spread beneath and around us.

The walls of the ancient Castle are delicately mossed and garlanded with the profuse flowering mother-of-millions, the tiny wall-rue, and elegantly-tufted black maiden-hair spleen-wort. As the sha-

dows deepened, twinkling fire-flies floated everywhere like sparks against the dark green of the trees. On the left-hand side of the road there is a little Inn, and over the hill-top one of the loveliest walks that heart could desire. In the day-time it is too hot and exposed unless there be a breeze, but between sunset and moonrise, as we saw it, we thought there could be nothing more charming in the whole range of Rhine scenery. It overlooks a narrow valley, quite in the hollow of which we could discern a trickling thread of water, and the sparkling spray tossed off by several busy mill-wheels; and the seclusions of the little glen appeared so sweet and beguiling from our twilight point of discovery, that on the morrow early we determined on setting forth to explore them. •

Our road this morning wound round under the Castle Hill, and in the shady warmth the entrance to the valley seemed no less attractive than in the maize-tinted and violet mists of last night. My friend rode an insignificant donkey, but I, as in all similar excursions, preferred my own trusty Shank's Nag, which served me better and less reluctantly than hers. Hans was the name of her beast,—an

obstinate, cross-grained, deplorable old ass, hard to drive and impossible to beguile; for he was an adept in every stratagem by which donkey-wit evades its work or makes it pain and grief to his luckless rider. Nevertheless, stimulated by his young master behind and coaxed by myself with a green bough in front, he consented, after much persuasion and several attempts to return to his stable, to make with us the pilgrimage of the valley of the mills.

There was nothing very great or wild or remarkable in its scenery, but it drew us on from point to point in a gently seductive way that it was pleasanter to follow than to resist. Not that every turn of the road shewed us something new, but that each curve was such a sweet variation on the last that we must needs go on to see how many changes nature could ring on the same key. The stream that furnishes water-power to the mills ran with a merry music over the stones, skirted on the side towards the road by a strip of meadow; beyond it, the hill, clad to the summit with verdure, rose at once too steep for any foot to ascend. To the right of the road also the hills rose, but they were less luxuriant in their covering. At first a forlorn hope

of vines had been attempted, but it was soon abandoned on the slaty cliffs, and the gray declivities were left to the careless but always graceful garniture of nature.

For some part of the way there were three young women before us in their national costume—trim, serviceable, and cleanly. They were all neat, straight-made girls, and the tallest was even handsome. They were probably on their road to some rural *fete*; and the sight of their short woollen skirts, shapely boddices, white stomachers, and bright buckled shoes suggested a regret that a national dress is not in vogue amongst our English rustic maidens instead of their present imitative finery. Their hair was fastened neatly up under high-crowned caps, and each carried over her arm a loose jacket of cloth, ornamented with braid. They struck off up a by-path over the hills presently, and so we lost sight of them.

The road wound with a gradual ascent all the way to the head of the valley, which became narrower as we advanced, the hills at either side drawing closer together until, at last, they met and swept round in a semi-circle, where stood a mill with a fair green meadow melting away amongst

the shade of trees beyond it. A group of hay-makers tossing the perfumed grass were at work in the sun, and down a rough declivity close at hand trickled the little stream that widened through the valley.

It was now the heat of the day, so we left Hans and his master at the mill, and clambered up to rest amongst the ferny knolls and bushes; and after the white glare of the unsheltered road, the shadow and cool air were very grateful and refreshing. But it was not quite Eden all; for the gnats and flies, following the moisture of the stream, buzzed about us with such a stinging persistence that we were glad to beat a retreat before them, and betake ourselves to a more open spot, which we found still in the shade, by crossing the brook on stepping-stones to a grassy hollow in the wood, where we could sit under the trees and have the water coolly rippling close by our feet. And here we ate our luncheon, and drowsed and talked through the long summer afternoon in a lazy mood of enjoyment, watching the long sails of the burnished dragon-fly, passing and repassing through the golden heat, and the white mackerel clouds dappling the blue sky.

Our only disturbance came from a snappish cur that rushed out of the mill and awoke every echo of hill and valley by his vehement remonstrances against our shady settlement in the wilderness ; a disagreeable dog, but one to be respected ; for not even biscuit or chicken-bones availed to soften his animosity, and as for missiles, threats, and adjurations, he defied them one and all with the stern virtue of a faithful guardian standing on his own territory. He, however, confined his attack to noise, and did not attempt to cross the water, and by the time he was hoarse and breathless a stout damsel appeared from the mill, whose call he obeyed with wrathful reluctance, turning again and again as he retired to run back and hurl at us a fresh defiance. When he was shut up there was sweet peace in the valley until Hans and his master rejoined us, and in the cool of the evening we returned to our Inn, well contented with a day spent after our own hearts.

We are lazy travellers, it is true, and shall perhaps not be able to pass a very triumphant examination as to what we have seen and done when we return to our kinsfolk and friends at home ; but

that does not disquiet us ; we are pleasing ourselves and laying in good store of health and spirits, so that when our holiday-tour is accomplished, it will not have been one altogether of lost opportunities.





V.

ON THE RIVER.

WE rose betimes to-day to go up the river to Mayence, where we hoped to hear the famous Austrian bands belonging to the regiments now in garrison there; and though we were disappointed in the object of our expedition, the glory of the sky and hills and river was compensation more than enough for what we missed. It was scarcely four o'clock when we started, and the deep purple shadows of night still hung about the dawn, but soon the golden blaze of sun burst through the violet bars of cloud, and it was day! I would not have lost this view of morning splendour on the Rhine for all else we have seen in our holiday-tour.

First, the Lurleyberg frowning across the river dark and silent; then the islet toll-castle of Pfalz, and then the toy-walls and towers of an-

cient Bacharach; next Lorch, at the entrance of a picturesque valley, the blue glimpses of which tempted my fancy into a long, easy pilgrimage; then the fair Nahe with Bingen at its mouth, and the Rheinstein Castle, where our young English Princess has her summer home, perched on a cliff, rising sheer above the river; and Johannisberg with its rich vine-clad slopes, and Biebrich, with the Duke of Nassau's palace, and Castel and Mayence with its bridge of boats, and dreary old streets and quaint red sandstone cathedral of immense antiquity, where Guttenberg has his memorial statue.

Music there was none. We were a day too soon or a day too late,—I could not distinctly understand which,—and we returned to St Goar by the next boat, in the broad, shining afternoon.

The rush of summer tourists has not yet set in—all the pleasanter for us, as go where we will we are well-lodged and well-served. Neither river nor road is thronged. The Americans, who in ordinary seasons are perhaps the fullest current of the stream of invaders, have work on their hands at home which leaves them no leisure for making holiday; and the English are said to be so deeply affronted

by a recent imprisonment inflicted on one of their countrymen for a breach of obedience towards a Prussian official, that they are likely to withdraw their favour from the scene of his calamity—thus, at least, opined the respectable captain of the steam-boat on which we went up the river to-day.

We had the deck to ourselves for nearly two hours, but about six o'clock appeared this gentleman from his cabin, looking very fresh, ruddy, and good-humoured; and after a few remarks on the glory of the July morning, and the unusualness of women exerting themselves to enjoy it, he fell into conversation with us on general and political topics, thence diverging—and growing fiercely indignant as he diverged—to the special newspaper topic of the moment, and the behaviour of English folks' abroad.

He did not mass them all together; he was as well able to distinguish the gentleman and gentlewoman on their travels as we are here; but the loud, self-asserting, ostentatious bagman—for this was his generic name for the class he detested—was also as patent to his perceptions as he is to ours in the pages of *Punch*. He was singularly

just in his characterisation of the different orders of British tourists—expressing much the same sentiments a high-class newspaper would express in a sarcastic mood ; and permitting us to understand that the bagmen and bagwomen preponderate so excessively over the courteous, quiet, and well-bred, that the English as a body are, to use a gentle term, becoming unpopular.

Hitherto I had always undoubtingly believed that, whatever their faults of bluster and pomposity, they were lavish of their money, that they floated round the world on a genuine golden Pactolus, spreading fertility wherever they went ; but our witness testified that no other traveller was guilty of the irritating small meannesses which the florid, obtrusive British vagrant perpetrates without a blush ; and that under the sun there is not to be found a parallel for his crasse ignorance or his overbearing pride. The captain's opinion may be general, or it may be particular to himself—we do not happen to have fallen in with his ideal bagman, or any of his kinswomen ; but perhaps there is room for some of our country-folks to mend their foreign manners. Why should a simple citizen at home feign himself a bumptious baron abroad ?

Some people have extraordinary adventures and meet with original characters at every turn of their wanderings—we, I begin to fear, are to have all monotonously easy, commonplace, and pleasant. The nearest approach to an oddity we have encountered yet was a solitary English spinster, lean and poor, on the boat to-day returning from Mayence to St Goar; and I am not able to settle it satisfactorily whether she was slightly cracked, or whether she was an errant Bible-woman in the exercise of her vocation—she was a good soul, at all events.

I noticed her first standing in conversation with two handsome elderly ladies, whose appearance was English of the best order, but who were in reality Danes. She had a panoramic picture-map hanging from her cotton-gloved hand, and her keen observant eyes were fastened on my travelling companion with deep and evident interest. By and by she stept over to me and asked if my friend, who was at the moment out of earshot, was a member of any religious Sisterhood. My answer in the negative drew forth remarks explanatory of the question, and in two minutes she was chatting as freely as if she had known me all my life.

She commented on the plainness of our carmelite attire as having led her to suppose us Sisters at large; and from the tenor of her further talk she betrayed that she thought we must to a certainty know *her*. I did not like to wound her sense of distinction by confessing myself equally ignorant of her name and her person; therefore I listened to all her statements with meek assent, trusting that some casual remark would enlighten me presently. But no such remark was forthcoming; in full flow her conversation was vague and very parenthetical.

The only woman who occurred to me as being vagrant like herself, elderly and at the same time famous, was Madame Ida Pfeiffer, and I fancied that lady was dead. I however hazarded the question, "You are not Madame Ida Pfeiffer, are you?" on which she smiled, astonished, and said, "Oh, no!" She then told me her name, which I had never heard before, and gave me an invitation to visit her at Cologne where she lived, if we made any stay there. Still, from the wandering of her eyes as she talked, it was clear I was a secondary person in her thoughts, regarded chiefly as a medium of approach to my friend, who was less easily

assailable by strangers than myself; an introduction was therefore effected, and the Sisterhood suspicion furnished a text for a gossip on Sisterhoods in general, and religious communities at home and abroad, which lasted until we were opposite St Goar, from which a boat put off to receive passengers who were desirous of landing there. We were amongst those who left; our new acquaintance amongst those who stayed behind. We shook hands cordially, and her parting whisper was, "Are you Sisters in the Lord, my dears, that is the question—are you Sisters in the Lord?" And so good-by and God bless us!





VI.

THE BROAD STONE OF HONOUR.

EHRENBREITSTEIN looks across the fair valley of the Moselle like a giant keeping stern watch and ward over a much-coveted treasure; armed to the teeth, and ready with four hundred deadly voices to defy every menace of robbers from without. Famine has reduced it, force never. In truce once destroyed, but built up again now, a fortress impregnable. There was an old soldier there who had lost his wits, and who followed us to and fro pertinaciously until we had seen the wonderful well at the top of the fortress, by means of which water is drawn up from the inexhaustible river below, and then he left us. The garrison will never need capitulate for thirst.

The river from the battlements, stretching to the blue mountains of Lorraine, in the lustrous clearness of early evening, was indescribably magnificent.

The eye can behold, the soul can feel, the memory even can carry away an impression of the exquisite beauty, grandeur, and richness of this splendid Sheneland, but no words of poet or art of painter can embody them in song or picture. The radiant plain was not a pretty vignette to be quaintly sketched and dressed in neat descriptive phrases, but a pageant of earth, sky, and water made all glorious by the fire of the evening sun as by the very smile of God.

From the ancient bridge of the Moselle the prospect is also very beautiful. I like that bridge with its many arches of heavy stone a thousand times better than the modern triumphs of iron high swung in the air. The town of Coblenz itself strikes us as a cheerful and pleasant place, and here we have heard at last the Austrian band. It was steaming down the river from Mayence to Cologne, and gave us an agreeable surprise to the tune of "Bonnie Dundee;" and as the vessel floated under Ehrenbreitstein they played the national air, which is our "God Save the Queen;" and a very pleasant home-sound it had so far away.

Entering a Lutheran Church yesterday morning, we heard one of those full choruses of German

voices that are so fine in sacred songs. The congregation was divided, the men sitting on one side of the edifice, the women on the other. Amongst the women here I noticed that the matrons wore upon their heads curious caps of cloth embroidered with gold, silver, and parti-coloured silks, while the maidens had their abundant plaits of hair uncovered, and knotted up behind with a bodkin of metal, plain, damasked, or filigreed, to secure them. Of personal beauty we have seen little either here or elsewhere in Germany. The features are often good, the expression is intelligent and kindly, but there is no fresh rose of complexion, no velvety peach-bloom, such as irradiates an English girl's face.

Another lack that I find, is the lack of public music. It may perhaps sound paradoxical to say so, but my impression is that we are more musical at home than are any of our neighbours abroad. With the exception of the regimental band playing in the barrack-square yesterday, and the Austrian band on its way to a change of quarters, we have heard no open-air music at all.



VII.

HOMEWARDS.

I HAVE lost my travelling-companion, and am alone now. We came down the Rhine together from Remagen, where we had lingered away four drowsy days, past the Drachenfels and Königswinter and Bonn to old Cologne, where we found our letters and our separate routes—hers back to Paris, mine home by way of Belgium. But we had some hours before us of a brilliant day, and these we spent roaming through the quaint streets and round about the cathedral, where there is an army of masons at work. We went to an evening service there, and sat through two long hours unwearied in its gemmed solemnity. There was a sermon, and it *looked* a good one, from the earnestness of the preacher and the attention of the congregation, but I am no German scholar, and my eyes were more awake than my wits. As

the warm sun faded, and gloom of night gathered in the high roof, we went away with the benediction in our ears, first to our inn, then to the railway, and by the swift Express to Verviers, where we parted and took our separate ways.

Where is now, I wonder, that luckless Frenchwoman, who, the moment before starting, got into our train, and, as soon as it was well under way, proceeded to do herself up so cosily in her night-cap? What became of her when she was extracted from the carriage suddenly by authorities of the law, and borne off into the darkness remonstrant but helpless? She looked so old-maidenly, so respectable, so truly commonplace and placid, as she joined our party of two with a few words of courteous self-gratulation at falling into a quiet, feminine society, that we were immediately pre-possessed in her favour. Her dress was simple and good, her manner perfectly easy, her conversation vivacious. She had come from Berlin, and was going on to Aix-la-Chapelle she told us. She brought forward an elegant little basket, and partook of refreshment; she contemplated the gathering gloom with undisturbed serenity; and finally, laying aside her bonnet, she put on an exceedingly

neat cap with a multiplicity of gophered borders, and composed herself into her cushioned corner for a long slumber. My friend fell napping too, but I, more wakeful, watched the trees flitting by through the darkness, and the sparks from the engine flying across the night, now and then giving a glance and a thought to the two faces opposite lit by the dull lamp in the roof of the carriage.

The stranger's visage was lean, and as consciousness abandoned her, its features dropt from their smiling calm into an anxious haggardness. She stirred in her sleep and muttered, nothing audibly, but her dreams were disquieting and troubled.

We had been about an hour on our road when the train gradually slackened speed and stopt, but at a spot where I could see neither station nor town near—nothing on either hand but level fields. There was a quick slamming of carriage-doors one after another, drawing at each step nearer to ours, which was opened peremptorily, as an official person, with two others dim and dark behind him, flashed a lantern full on the stranger's sleeping face through the window.

"La v'là !" cried he ; and as she woke up with a start and a gasp, he added, in a tone that meant

mischievous, "Madame, vous me ferez l'honneur de descendre !" Madame shrills out, "Mais pourquoi, Messieurs ?" but begins without delay to pull off that innocent gophered cap, and to cover her hapless head with her bonnet ; quaking and shaking, and plaintively assuring us that she does not know why she is put to this cruel inconvenience.

I am afraid Madame knew why well enough, but is it in the nature of Britons, male or female, to see the weak *put-upon* and not lift up the voices of inquiry and argument ? It was not in ours—besides, she looked so thoroughly respectable ! "Why was she taken off thus—a peaceable traveller ?" we asked. The official person moderated his official tone, and answered us with respect but not with explanation ; and as Madame lingered in a last hope of escape over her impromptu toilette, he again admonished her with awful civility to do him the honour to descend. The two men in the back-ground stood waiting, calm as fate ; the guard of the train, and a curious group of watchful faces clustered eagerly round the circle of light made by the lantern ; and out into that circle stepped Madame, elegant basket and all, and was swallowed up instantaneously in darkness and mystery.

Yesterday I was in Brussels, trim, cleanly, and cheerful—Paris in miniature. Before my inn window was the statue of Godefroi de Bouillon and the church of the Madeleine. I wandered through the park where Charlotte Brontë laid some of the scenes of her “*Vilette* ;” I saw St Gudule, and the Hôtel de Ville, and the wonderful whiteness of the palaces and public offices, and I made up my mind, whether from old associations or not I cannot say, that I like an ancient city better than a modern town, picturesque gothicism better than broad boulevards; and therefore this morning I took flight to Antwerp, the idea of which had fascinated my imagination for many a long day.

Leaving Brussels by an early train, at nine o'clock I found myself standing alone in the midst of a drenching rain in the Green Square, opposite the cathedral where the statue of Rubens is. The exquisite spire, object of my longing curiosity, pierced a misty, murky sky with its fretted glory of pale gray stone against a darker gray of cloud. At Antwerp the rain comes down with a will, but I drew my cloak about me and walked round and round the magnificent edifice, viewing it from every attainable point; but the houses encroach upon it

too closely to allow of its being seen completely from any. Then I found Quintin Matsy's masterpiece in ironwork, and by that time, being thoroughly drenched and wet-foot, I took refuge within the cathedral. A guide had haunted me till now, but, at last, to my exceeding thankfulness he disappeared:—I cannot enjoy anything properly with a man at my elbow telling me what to admire; indeed, I would rather not see anything than not see it in my own way, and, so to speak, through my own spectacles.

Unluckily it was a fête-day—the festival of St Peter; and the services, which continued until nearly one o'clock, with intervals of a few minutes between each, had already begun; so I sat down with the crowd in the nave patiently and admired. The frequent change of congregations gave me the opportunity of moving from one part of the church to another, but I finally settled in a small side-chapel where was a crucifix in pure white marble, and one old woman devoutly kneeling before it. This sculptured representation of our Saviour seemed to me of an exquisite and pathetic beauty.

The lengthy services over, and the cathedral emptied of worshippers, the great Rubens's pictures

of the Descent from the Cross and the Raising of the Cross were uncovered for the inspection of precisely five strangers. I have read many criticisms on these famous paintings, yet did I venture to form an opinion of my own. They were to my feeling glorious human pictures, such as must be for ever touching to human hearts. Is there anywhere man's work portraying the Man Christ dying on the Cross, and those who loved Him weeping at its foot, that has greater power or greater truth than Rubens's work? What was the scene in reality? Not Divinity triumphant, but Divinity incarnate, to mortal eyes invisible, subject to taunt, humiliation, and cruel death. I think Rubens paints the Sacrifice on Calvary as the Roman soldiers saw it, as Mary saw it, as the beloved John saw it—as all must see it who have not angels' eyes to behold the face of God without eclipse.

It was still pouring, pouring, pouring, when I turned out into the Square again, yet I threaded several of the ancient streets, admiring their quaint houses, piled seven stories high, and decorated with rich tracery on their peaked and gabled

fronts. Wearied out at last, I called a *fiacre* and drove to the Church of St Jacques, outside the gates of which stood a youthful English couple under umbrellas in the heavy rain. The pretty girl-bride looked fussed, fevered, and anxious, and her despotic Turk of a very young husband was saying just as my *fiacre* stopped—"Now if it is more than a franc for both of us I shall not go in." The beadle came up a minute after to unlock the gates. "Two francs for the three," said the official, without question asked, probably supposing us one party. The young man looked at me, and I looked at the young man, and the bride looked at both of us, and the beadle looked at all three. I had heard the Turk's assurance to his wife, and he had seen that I heard it, therefore my remark was only like taking up a dropped conversation—"I should have paid a franc had I been alone, and therefore it is all right—let us go in," said I, and we went in accordingly—he paying his franc and I mine.

What an unpleasant companion he must have been on a sentimental journey! He was very fair and very square, very broad-faced and very short-necked, very loud and very foolish. He had a few

words of clumsy French and a great many of blustering English. The church was being white-washed, and certainly looked deplorable in its swathements and scaffoldings, but it was all a take-in together, he proclaimed; he never saw anything so meretricious in his life as this carving and gilding and painting and marble. And, pray, who *was* this fellow Rubens who had got a picture for his monument? He could not see anything in him—what horrid weather it was, and come along, Clara, what are you stopping there for? Clara was stopping there to rest a minute on the edge of one of the workmen's tressels, but she came along at his bidding, though with an air too jaded and spiritless even to feign an interest in what she saw. He asked what ailed her, as if her evident fatigue aggrieved him, but he listened for no answer, and she did not open her lips to make one. There was some thought and feeling in her face, but she was already cowed into a patient wife; perhaps she had learned even in this little space of their married life that it would be worse than useless to struggle against the selfish dulness of such a helpmeet as fate and fortune had allotted her. I felt sorry for the poor little woman who had to travel

with him further than Antwerp and longer than the honeymoon—of course they were bride and bridegroom ; no sister would have put up with him as meekly as did she. We left the church together, and as my *fiacre* drove away, I lost sight of them tramping through the mud—she dead-beat, lagging a pace or two behind her master, and holding her umbrella feebly against the wind. To what an ordeal had they exposed young Love in this foreign trip!—why did they not go to Margate and eat shrimps?

After quitting St Jacques I entered other churches, but evidently this is the season of the great annual revivification with which Belgian bad taste hides the grain of the stone and spoils the interior of all its sacred edifices ; so I drove back to the railway station, hoping for better luck and better weather the next time I see Antwerp—if ever I see it again—and took a ticket for Ostend by way of Ghent, longing, if I may tell the truth, for a glimpse and a breath of the sea more than I can express.

For the loneliness of river-scenery, for a fore-taste of what one might feel cast adrift on the

world, loosed from ties of kindred, friends and country, I shall ever remember my dreary passage of the Scheldt this wild and gusty afternoon. The rain had ceased, the clouds were broken, and even a yellow gleam of sun slanted now and then athwart the gloom; but the wind came up the river first with a long lamentable moan like the echo of drowning cries, and again with a wild, shuddering howl that chilled me to the very marrow of my bones. About half-way across I looked back to the city, and saw the cathedral roof and the spire relieved in all its wonderful grace and aerial beauty against the stormy dark of a thunder-cloud whose edges were as of burnished copper, and I had no one to whom I could say, "How beautiful!"

Passing through Ghent and Bruges I saw those inevitable poles and workmen everywhere. This is the era of reconstruction, completion, rehabilitation. Twenty years hence for those who are young then, what glories will there be accomplished that we saw only in their transition state. Cologne Spire finished perhaps, and Paris a new city of palaces that is now half in the dust. I cannot call to mind at this moment one ancient

edifice that was not undergoing some process of advance or retrogression—yes! I do not think they were at work on Strasbourg Cathedral—but I dare not be sure. Perhaps there was something going on round a corner where we did not penetrate; but all was very still within—only the wonderful clock telling the hours, and a few devout worshippers kneeling by that ancient effigy of our Lord where the wounds are worn by the kisses of the faithful.

I can hear the monotonous song of the sea as I sit in my room of this great empty Inn, and to-morrow night I shall be on it, going home—not ungladly—my holiday-tour over and over successfully. But for a place to live in give me England and my own little cottage that looks on sunny downs and sunny sea. I shall go back to it fuller of quiet content than ever, but with a store of pleasant sketches for my picture-book of memorials too.





IN THE WORKADAY WORLD.

“ A woman has much virtue, but not many virtues ; she requires a confined sphere and social forms.”

JEAN PAUL RICHTER.



I.

ON A PINK PAMPHLET.

YES, one of the most enjoyable sensations of going abroad is assuredly the coming home again! What a rich greenness on the hills, what a golden glow on the corn-fields, what an opalescent brightness on the calm sea last night! Then the faces of welcoming friends, the glad grin of my old servant, the momentary retreat and purring recognition of my cat! I delight myself in trifles. At some moments the turning of a straw is enough to make me happy—it is now. Whatever the future may bring in its net, I fancy it will always be a satisfaction to me to remember that I have wrung some little pleasure out of my life; that if I have had to do many a hard day's work, I have yet always enjoyed my holiday. Only let heaven shine kindly on me *now*, and it is enough; never will I turn my back upon the sun

because I have no guarantee against wet and cloudy weather on some uncertain to-morrow!

It is a lovely morning—dewy, flowery, tempting—but I shall not shut it out of my quiet corner in the workaday world; for perhaps it will shew me a cheering light through the labyrinth that I have to thread. Oh, dreary, dreary little pink pamphlet! Oh, cruel, cruel friend to lay its burden on me! What can I say about women and work that has not been said before, and better said? And I am above all to be *practical*; when it is a pet fancy of mine that every soul has its own theory of all things actual and possible, and will not be limited in its endeavours after a perfect life by any other soul's advice. Youth, stiff-necked, will not hear it; Experience, well humbled, does not need it.

Besides, I have not the conscience to preach work and independence to any girl while yet she may have the alternative of love and home and children; for it is my honest belief that no labour, no success, no ease, no anything, can compensate a woman endowed with the strong instincts of loving and serving, for the enforced solitude and perpetual denial of the noblest part of her being. The present generation does produce crowds of

female souls to whom "not even a temporal delusive image of love has been sent;" but to every budding female soul hope and nature and her mother's fair example combine to suggest that fortune must have for her a better destiny in store than a life of thankless toil amongst aliens.

Richter, who proved the worth and weight of most forms of labour, sorrow, and pain, crowned by ultimate happiness and success, says of one of his heroes—the Advocate of the Poor—"The cottage smoke gnawed into him, which of itself oppresses us so much that there is rarely any one to be found who can quite lift his head above the vapour. A confounded inclination towards sitting-still comfort, that is to say, nestles in a man." And if in a man, how much more in a woman? Yet many thousands of women contemplate the close, dear union of the family life for years together under the happiest auspices, and, like outcasts from Paradise, weep at the gates, longing to enter in and be themselves blest, while for their home-sickness, never to be appeased, they are bidden to find rest in work.

Rest in work—as if life for them were to be *all* penance. Work is a right excellent thing in its

place, but it is the means of existence, not its end. Men do their work in the world, and trust to find their rest in loving homes; why should women be exhorted to work for work's sake, and then to work again for rest and comfort and refreshing? That "confounded inclination towards sitting-still comfort," which Richter speaks of, sets the feminine heart against all such paradoxical admonitions.

But, you may object, as it is very clear that many women are not destined by Providence to indulge the natural longing, let them covet it ever so patiently or impatiently, its negation must needs be accepted with dignity and equanimity. Advanced civilisation has written us a riddle of surplus women which is talked of late and early by all manners of men, and set aside as a social problem for which there is no solution in words; perhaps only a still further advance can unriddle it. Meanwhile may we not have an interregnum of compromises and expedients for the amelioration of all these unappropriated female lives? It is very desirable indeed that we should; the question, in fact, grows imperative.

I admit it—refuges for the destitute by all means, and bread for the hungry! Some poor creatures are

born blind, others deaf, others dumb; many are born to go halting all their days, and not a few to live and die unmated. Privations, evils, trials of poor humanity—yet, good! if it be God's will that poor humanity should bear them, who dares murmur? Ah! it consoles one for many things unalterable and inexplicable to stick by that old-fashioned precept of Christian Philosophy that whatever Cross we carry is rough-hewn in Heaven.

Did any little maiden in her blush come to me for counsel in shaping her life I should dismiss her with the blessing of the most kindly humorist of "Vanity Fair." "To be good, to be simple, to be modest, to be loved, be thy lot!" But if she came again with all the bright slides in her magic-lantern of hope obscured by mist of tears, or blank for lack of light, I would bid her give up straining her sight for pretty pictures in the dark glass, and betake herself heartily to work; with a cheering assurance that in all good work lies a very genuine and permanent stay for the mind, and a very wholesome discipline for the body. By and by she would begin to invent hobbies and leisure-ploys to relieve the tedium of the day's tasks; she would look

abroad in the world, and find a hundred simple pleasures to counteract the burden of petty grievances, and see herself exempt from many and cruel cares which fasten upon those possessing joys withheld from her. If the pang of isolation overcame her at times, she would take the angel Patience by the hand; if she experienced disappointments, fatigues, or agonies, she would be very sure that such are falling to the common lot of women everywhere.

Montaigne says that he invariably made a point of bringing all persons with whom he conversed to speak of those things which they best understood, and perhaps nearly twenty years of self-dependence may be admitted as my title to know somewhat of my kind when set by fortune to stand alone, and help and keep themselves. Yet even I must think before speaking; I must try back on my own feelings before I can generalise about the feelings of other folks. You see, people who are in the midst of the strife cannot stay to theorise over it; they must *do*, and leave the lookers-on to discuss. But truly, to have received a few good whacks, and to have kissed the dust once or twice during the con-

test, does give a marvellous air of reality to one's gossip about it when it is over ; and wounds so often ache at change of weather long after they are healed, that the sting vividly restores the time and circumstances when they were fresh. Also those who have never been wounded cannot delicately appreciate the sensations they profess to describe, and some of them are such bunglers at salving and dressing that they communicate to their patients nervous thrills of irritation instead of comfort or cure. I confess to having winced and quivered under such myself. A woman may have to do all her fighting for herself until she is so weather-worn and sun-burnt that blushes don't shew, but she is always a woman at heart, and does not enjoy the remarks passed on the unbeautiful scars of her womanliness—for so capability, and independence of spirit, and strength of mind are still commonly considered by the majority of men. A very amiable good woman has suggested that we should not heed *Opinion*; that we ought to do right and never mind—but *Ought* is a strait bridge to carry us over that fussing, fuming stream, and so many would rather glide down it on any bit of a raft they can catch than face the peril of crossing it, that her noble counsel

shares the fate of all lofty achievements, and is appreciated only by the fit and few. Now this tiresome little pink pamphlet wants help and direction for a multitude.

If I endeavour to call over the imperceptible stages which have drifted me on from girlhood to gray hairs, and brought me contented and cheerful to this pause midway my journey, I know the ghosts of young troubles and the sigh of young sighs will begin to gloom and echo all around me in the still summer sunshine. A lonely laborious life is quite endurable, taken in short forward views; but a retrospect which shews us all we have voluntarily foregone, all we have idly slighted, all we have blindly missed—that is *not* exhilarating. It makes one cry for one's old self, as if the dusty vision were of quite some other poor soul's feebly-foughten battle.

Habit works wonders, but I fancy all women are by nature averse to self-dependence—I was myself. I can very well recollect the axioms of discretion and valour that used to be preached to me during my apprenticeship, and the somewhat stinging admonitions to get rid of my sensitiveness and choke

back my tears if I would prosper in the workaday world which it was my destiny to face on my own account. The matter might have been put before me in a more cheerful light, for I have not found it an unkind world by any means; but at that date it was still felt as something anomalous in the arrangement of things that a girl should be systematically trained to independent exertion, and she was certain to be the object of deep commiseration, if not of contempt, to her better-endowed contemporaries. Of course, I experienced at the time the natural amount of silent mortification, but being well assured that there was no help for it, I accepted my lot with a resolve to make the best of it; and it has proved a very tolerable lot, and rich in blessings of its own.

I acknowledge this with all thankfulness, but still I should not like to see any girl in whom I felt an affectionate interest voluntarily electing herself to the same life. It has more than once happened to me to hear it called *enviable*—the pleasantest sort of life in the world—by young folks undergoing temporary contradiction from superior powers; but I have always made it my duty to demolish the notion with a little growl of

denial and warning. Don't I remember Christmas Eves and Christmas Nights with mother-love in the midst, and a bunch of children's rosy faces round the hearth at home, and fun, and nuts, and stories, and cake-and-cheese, and holly-sprigs, and all of us together? And don't I remember other Christmas Eves and Christmas Nights spent in solitary ease by my school-room window, with the blind up, looking out into the snow-stormy darkness, when I felt, oh, so forlorn and prematurely philosophical; and can I persuade myself that I was as happy in my want of cares as my good mother with her double load? Why, I used to grow so sick of my own cheerlessness that I tried to put on the hours by reading over old letters and turning over old relics, as old people do; and ever since that epoch the great Christmas Festival has been to me less a season of rejoicing in good company than a halting-place to take toll of time and count over its losses and its gains. So much for custom.

This perhaps sounds pointless and unpractical, but wait a while. Can you figure to yourself gray heads wagging on wise shoulders, and kind tongues protesting that the clever lass who can help and keep herself is better off than if she were wooed

and married and a'?' preaching down her heart with maxims, shrewd of sound, short of sense, and with utter selfishness at the core of every one? I have heard this; and I know that the lass who *can* help and keep herself, who has tasted independence, and got over the strangeness and terror of the world, is very apt to hearken and assent; to shirk a woman's highest duties and holiest cares, and to discover, with a too-late regret, that Love has slipped by her under their Crown of Thorns. Thenceforth she may work and wake, safe and self-centred; resigned perhaps, and by and by content, but *happy* never. Except in the family-life, as the world's law stands now, one-half of her faculties lie waste; and these unused faculties are so many thorns perpetually to sting her.

No, friend, I have no call to proclaim your gospel of independence for women. I shall go out and warm myself in the sun. Chill airs, such as breathe from everybody's past, thrill along the plaintive chords of my memory, and make me shudder and shrink, as if idle feet were trampling over the place of my grave. Where is it? in the green sunshine of some country churchyard—of this that I see through the elms in the winding

lane? I have queer fancies about graves—last homes—for seven years my familiar, everyday look-out was upon a churchyard, and I feel its atmosphere now, for all the sun is shining and there's not a breath in the air.





II.

WITH THE CURTAINS DRAWN.

I HAVE just read for the twentieth time the preface to an article on the Enfranchisement of Women, reprinted in a certain volume of "Dissertations and Discussions," which of course you know. In this preface is written the panegyric of a noble wife who possessed the tenderest of feminine virtues in combination with a masculine vigour of intellect; who in poetry, philosophy, oratory, or art, "would easily have taken the highest rank, had not her own inclination led her for the most part to content herself with being the inspirer, prompter, and unavowed coadjutor of others." In the next sentence it is said that the Enfranchisement of Women was a cause that she had deeply at heart—and here I always pause bewildered. Why did not this most wise, loving and beloved of wives measure the spirit of her sex by

her own, pure womanly? To inspire, to prompt, to aid, was her practical vocation; that her sisters should be, do, and suffer on the world's stage, her darling vision. Which is the finer—her life or her dream? She, great of heart and soul, content, happy in the old order of things, or a Convention of Women clamouring for equal rights with Men? Have I imagined a contradiction where none exists? or is the contradiction there?

I don't care for the Essay nearly so much as for the Preface. The preface is a leaf of exquisite personal history, with that sort of human interest which every sympathetic person can appreciate; but the essay overleaps so many proverbs and prejudices, old saws and modern instances, that to follow it puts a slow reader quite out of breath. It takes three generations, they say, to evolve a gentleman from churls, and it can hardly take less to produce women able to bear the dignities and responsibilities, the awful wear and tear, of public life, as men bear them now; for the pace is tremendous; and as a matter of course, if women once enter for the race they will strain for the prizes; and oh, the bone and muscle, the wind, and length of limb those must have who would come in and win!

And the fine, sensitive woman-nature, how too must it be transformed before it will consent to exchange its homely joys for the gauds and glories of the outside world! Listen—this is of Charlotte Brontë: “Her fame when it came was of no use to her. She was just as solitary, and her life as deficient in interest, as before. She never criticised her books farther than to express utter weariness of them and of the labour they had given her.” Listen again to another wise woman’s utterance: “The happiness of loving and all the thousand little cares of affection are our greatest happiness. No one will ever cheat herself into a contrary belief for many days together.” And here speaks Elizabeth Barrett Browning, true wife and true poet—

“When all’s done, all tried, all counted here,
All great arts and good philosophies,
This love just puts its hand out in a dream,
And straight outreaches all things.”

But let us grant, for argument’s sake, that there is a select number of women to whom the old-fashioned bliss of womanhood is naught, the buried germs of whose energy would do the world good were they encouraged to grow outwards, and I think we must grant also that the result is in such women’s own hands much more than is commonly

supposed. If, instead of being checked by a cavil and a sneer from men and each other, the enterprising few who crave the excitement and interest of new paths were to go about their business in a sober matter-of-fact way, they would escape interference, silence ridicule, and after winning success, they would find respect at their service; but let a woman achieve proficiency before she claims equal rank with experts; and in achieving proficiency let her strive not to cry quarter though she may have to undergo many deaths. At every breach she makes in the stone wall of popular prejudice she must expect to be grievously wounded; but what of that, if she gain the citadel of her ambition at last, and sit down victor—that is, voter, doctor, lawyer, priest, the Lord knows what! Only let her then refrain from blowing trumpets of defiance, and the world will just stare and pass by and leave her—to work or to weep, as her mood may be.

Men who venture on proclaiming a strange heresy are persecuted, mocked, stoned, until some day heresy spins round, and, Janus-like, shews another face to which multitudes bow as to an image of truth. A stranger heresy than the Enfranchisement of Women the world has never

seen, and all the present forlorn-hope of Amazons must prepare to die before it can pass into a common article of faith and fact. But every great Cause deserves its Martyrs. A hundred years hence this may splendidly triumph; and if it do, the Sun will look down on a New Thing at last, and the Preacher's Wisdom will go out of fashion.





III.

OF THE DESIRABLE, THE POSSIBLE, AND THE PRACTICABLE.

IT is a long descent from the visionary to the desirable, and another long descent from the desirable to the possible, and from the possible to the readily practicable there is a whole long flight of steep and rugged steps; nevertheless, I think we all work better if we keep on looking upwards, and that much is gained by familiarising our minds with the aspect of those difficulties which time and toil and luck may overcome.

A vexatious obstacle to everybody's comfort and prosperity in these days seems to me to be the attitude of contempt which one class of work-folks and idle-folks assumes towards another. Surely never in any age before was the world so supercilious. Respect for humanity in the meanest is

the spirit of Christianity and of philosophy; sarcastic depreciation or affable patronage is the common tone of men's life and conversation.

Why sneer at the poor little failure of the weak, the half-done endeavour of the crippled? They are the best they can do—the best God has given them strength and opportunity to do. And all doing goes by comparison. Perhaps *your* lofty achievement is but a poor little failure, a half-done endeavour in the eyes of somebody else who sits in serene isolation fidgeting out a scheme which *he* fancies perfection, but which in its turn seems to another somebody only a makeshift, a trivial expedient, not worth wearying over at all.

In its feeblest, most pitiful, or most laborious efforts, Life is too perplexed, too sad, too real a thing for men to mock at. Every one is in earnest for himself. Who jests at his own anguish, scoffs at his own hard struggle? Who scorns his own joy or derides the bitter wisdom experience has taught him? His jibe and his by-word are for the pinch of his brother's shoe, never for his own; and this by no chance impulse, but by the habit of a narrow unsympathetic mind which has never travelled beyond the circle of its own interests, or attempted

to realise in imagination where every circle of humanity blends into another like waves of one common stream.

It always puts me out of countenance to hear or read the depreciatory remarks of one person or class upon the calling of another; such remarks may be only the idle words of quite insignificant people, but idle words are a mischievous power by whomsoever spoken; and to them may, I think, be attributed the weary, half-hearted way in which many positions once deemed sufficiently honourable are now filled. It is difficult for ordinary men and women to keep up a proper pride in their business when they know it is the subject of ridicule to other ordinary men and women. A few are stout enough to go their own way, doing their duty in that station of life to which it has pleased God to call them, but by far the greater number are under the influence of popular currents of feeling, and are depressed or exhilarated, according to the atmosphere of opinion which prevails around them. I cannot help wishing, therefore, that those who have the skill would write up the truth of common life, the pathos of common suffering, and the dignity of common labour; and this without any parade of

nonsensical sentiment—which the theme does not need—but with the simple recognition of every man's right to the respect of his fellow-men on the ground of their common humanity.

A hard, ugly, cynical view may be taken of each act and utterance of the wisest man ; and it is possible so to look at the grandest achievements and noblest sacrifices that they shall appear distorted, mean, and false ; but it is not the fashion so to look at them, and the satirist who should rail at success now-a-days would make but very few disciples. His wit therefore whets itself on the grindstones of poor souls, the sweat of whose despised labour keeps them well oiled and always whirling ; and a mob of dull people whose tongues have no sting make themselves his echoes until the world resounds with theories of race, order, clique, and kind enough to confuse and vex all the saints and guardian angels still doing their mission upon earth. One can fancy them praying, and praying earnestly, that it may soon be honourable once more to serve, to toil patiently at mean crafts, and to abide contentedly in an honest poverty, that they may have fewer lost to seek and fewer fallen to save.

IN HARVEST TIME.

"Like flames upon an altar shine the sheaves."
LONGFELLOW.



I.

FIRST-FRUITS AND GLEANINGS.

THIS is a real old-fashioned summer—a summer of the poets. Dawn breaks in golden glory through the tender haze which comes down on the hills at evening-twilight. One begins the day by setting wide doors and windows that the breath of flowers and zephyrs may float in commingled. I do not remember a season so beautiful since the summers when I was young—and the mirage of them is all one bright sheen of sunny weather. At noon there is a mist of heat on the hills, and one creeps into any cool corner to drowse through the mid-day hours in pure luxury of laziness. Not a twig stirs—not a leaf. There is no song of birds—only the dry chirp of the locust and the hum of bees rifling the rich honey-mines of the golden-moss.

In every hedgerow the sweet woodbine is still

profuse, and yesterday I found some of the exquisite deep pink wild-roses which used to bloom in the gipsy-lanes of my childhood, but which I never found hereabouts before. The buds are of the most vivid carmine and of the daintiest grace—no garden-rose in the whole calendar is comparable to this wildling for perfume and fairy beauty.

Hay-harvest was over early, and the cattle are again in the meadows. In my youth hay-time was a most pleasant time—a fragrant fortnight of holidays that were kept in the balmy fields until the twilight dwindled into dark, and the troops of men and maidens wended homewards singing loud snatches of song. Now it is robbed of half its poetry. There comes a whirring machine with two horses, a man, and a boy ; the tall grass is cut down in broad swathes ; then arrives another machine which tosses it over and over like a fountain, and in two or three days, behold it stacked ! Where is the old meadow-sweetness of it ?

It is much the same with the wheat and the bearded barley ; but the sun must still dry the ears on the brown hill-side though the bare-legged reapers have disappeared ; and so back to back, and shoulder to shoulder in firm array stand the

corn-sheaves, up and down the field, to and fro the field, and round about the field, an army of peaceful occupation, with the sun beating full upon them, and ripening each goodly grain to its perfection. But yesterday, under every windy gleam and banner of cloud the golden phalanx moved on and on like calm waves ebbing and flowing on an invisible shore ; to-day they are reaped, without a murmur, without a whisper, and God's purpose in them is accomplished—their own life ended they become the staff of man's life. But yesterday the scarlet poppies fluttered their fairy penons over the bronzed ranks ; to-day they lie poor, crushed, withered rags unseen amongst the solid squares ; their little day of beauty done, there is no more that they can do. Soon will come the word of command, the sheaves will march into the garner, and the busy gleaners will go about the stubble gathering their alms of harvest with a shrewd and careful patience.

The offering of the first-fruits amongst the ancient people of God was a beautiful formula of thanksgiving which had until lately its copy in some of our rural parishes. I know not whether it be still kept up in any such remote country-places ; I

never saw it practised, but it is one of our obsolete customs most truly worthy of revival. We have commuted too many of these our by-God-ordained tithings into hard cash in this material age; sentiment has gone out of fashion, and with it some genuine helps to spiritual and holy living. Mammon is almoner as often as Charity; he gives in gold what she gave in kind; and while the poor receive an ostentatious bounty in the shape of gifts, it seems as if in some places they were being gradually shorn of their just inheritance, bequeathed in trust for them by God to his stewards.

Is a sheaf forgotten in the field now fetched up, or is it left for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow? Are the olive-boughs twice beaten, and the vineyards gleaned after the grapes are gathered? Is a clean riddance made in the corners of the fields when they are reaped, and is the wayfarer suffered to eat his fill in the standing-corn or the vineyard of his neighbour? Hardly. If a starveling do but stay fainting life with a turnip, some Dogberry is ready to arrest, and some Shallow to punish the forlorn wretch. Instead of Boaz bidding his young men let fall some handfuls of corn before Ruth, we have Ruth standing at

the stile, looking over the gate, hiding under the hedge, and until Boaz has carried his last load to the barn, and then gleaning her pitiful sheaf after the broad wheels of his waggons and the hoofs of his horses. Year by year the old landmarks are removed, and the great man's fence creeps round the common and the village-green to take away the right of the poor. Perhaps they get some other rights in exchange which may be counted as a fair compensation, but these were their inheritance by immemorial custom, like the church-aisle and the grave-yard, and it seems neither just nor wise that they should be taken away, or bartered for an allotment-field, which is held at a master's pleasure by certain favoured persons and not by the community.

It sounds litigious to cavil at the well-meant changes of these modern days, but from the picturesque point of view all changes are not improvements. One is sorry to see the rustic sports of the old generation disappearing ; their fairs and feasts abolished ; to find the quaint words and sayings dying out, to inquire for the traditions of a parish or the ghost-story of its great house, and to be answered by some decent sage body that

there are no traditions, and that as for ghost-stories she does not believe in such *logic*—not she—she knows better. It is difficult to feel quite persuaded that for the loss of its ancient privileges rural-life has yet gained a full equivalent in wisdom or in blessings; it seems often deadly-dull, pruned of its merry-makings and its boisterous fun.

Hereabouts there is no extreme poverty. The people are a fine-looking race, somewhat proud, and always leisurely, for they have not yet experienced the sharp spur of active competition. It is never distressing to watch them at work, for one is quite assured that they will not overtax their strength. They are pleasant-spoken to strangers, and exceedingly helpful to each other in sickness or sorrow; the more so perhaps because having married and intermarried amongst themselves for generations they now constitute one large family of kinsfolk. This general connexion tends to the preservation of old habits and sentiments, though the world is too much with us now for the simplicity and primitiveness of village-life to linger much longer in their integrity. When they depart, it will be universally regretted—and depart soon they must; for the railway is coming.



II.

BITS OF SUNSHINE.

THERE is perhaps nothing that so thoroughly carries us out of ourselves, or so signally puts to the rout a gnat-swarm of petty cares and anxieties as a sudden invasion from a group of merry, healthy children.

Yesterday I received a vexation by post which pervaded the atmosphere of the whole day. I tried to work, but my thoughts would flow only in one channel, and that entirely private and personal; I tried to read, but every page found me wandering vaguely off on my own trouble; I sat with my hands folded and tried to philosophise—did you ever try to philosophise over an uncertainty? If you did, I need not tell you how hard, how all but impossible it is to do. Finally I resigned myself with a profound sigh to the contemplation of the impending grievance, and said

that I must drift, and let events that were too strong for my stemming take their own course; trusting always that there was at the helm the guiding hand which alone could bring me to a safe deliverance out of such a difficult and embarrassed stream of adverse circumstances as fortune had never set me upon navigating before. And so I slept on it. But peace of mind does not come invariably at the first call—it proved very coy to mine. This morning was still heavy with the same threatening cloud; and after some hours of ineffectual moral strivings against its gloom, I turned out for a spell of play-work in the garden,—sure of finding alleviation for my fretting anxiety there if anywhere.

It was but little I had done amongst my flowers, however, before my gate swung on its hinges, and a shrill small voice made itself heard petitioning: “Oh, will you come and shew us where the lady-ferns live? There is mamma waiting in the lane, with Clifford and Hasty on the donkey, and nurse—do come! Can you?”

Of course, I could, and as if by magic when I found myself amongst the children, and heard their tiny tumultuous prattle, the sky cleared, and

the sun came out again bright and hopeful. After all, my tortuous course might take a propitious turn—bring me into the open sooner than it seemed to promise. I had been too eager to welcome Worry; she might have come only to pass by—not to linger, an unbidden guest, and make herself at home amongst my peaceful and pleasant *Lares*. “Whether or no,” whispered Reason, “let us keep the door against her yet a little while longer; it will be time enough to give her a seat by the hearth when she announces that she has come to stay.” “Good,” said I, and turned my back on her forthwith.

We were a very cheerful procession to the woods. First there was Grahame, my messenger, with a great green frond of *Lastrea* twined round his straw hat, then there was sober-faced Clifford, fully equipped with basket and trowel for the digging up and carrying away of the Lady-ferns of which we were going in quest; and lastly there was Hastings, perched in serene state on Jinny, the handsome, very self-opinionated donkey which lives in the parsonage paddock, and is the property of the curate's children. Jinny's rightful owners being now away on a visit to grandmamma, somewhere

amongst the delicious green lanes of Devonshire, she does duty for other young folks with not more than average unwillingness. Her present freight are only temporary guests in our village, come out from a close East London parish to enjoy a month of sea and down-breezes. It is town-bred children who most revel in the country when they get there. To them every weed is lovely, the commonest flower a prize. Their pale faces brighten into bits of pure sunshine when they find themselves free in the woods and fields, or paddling barefoot on the shore, rich in marvels, and in treasures inestimable.

Grahame asked me if they should find primroses—primroses in August, bless him! Seven years in this beautiful world, and not yet to have seen a primrose or a spring-time in the country! Seven years—but that is nothing. Once long ago, being on a visit in London, I was invited to go down to Southall with the teachers of a great parish school; we mustered better than four hundred in all, and after an hour's rail, assembled in a flat meadow, near a lunatic asylum, for games and feasting. Amongst the girls there was one who singled me out, and attached herself to me through the day—a little maid of twelve or so, very shrewd and in-

telligent, with a stunted figure and a broad, early-wise, plain, kindly face. I was sitting alone, under the shade of a great elm, watching the romps, when she came up, and abruptly introduced herself with the exclamation; "Oh, teacher, see what a beautiful flower!" and presented a bit of rusty hawk-weed gathered from the roadside bank; and thereupon we fell a-talking. She had never plucked a flower, or even a bit of rusty hawk-weed in her life before. Her notions of the country were such as an exclusive reading of the Bible would impress on a simple, thoughtful, child's heart, and her notions of the country were also her notions of Heaven—a green, quiet place—no more. She had heard of the everlasting hills, of the hart longing for the water-brooks, of Jesus walking through the corn-fields on the Sabbath-day, but hills, or water-brooks, or corn-fields she had never seen except in the rudely-coloured Scripture prints which she told me embellished the school-house wall. But she had once been to Broadstairs, and though it was so long ago that the place existed in her imagination as a mere name hallowed by lost memories of unutterable happiness, when I said that I had *not* been to Broadstairs, her countenance grew over-

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cast, and she felt sorry for my deprivation of a joy which was hers for ever. The last sight I had of her was in one of the crowded carriages vehemently nodding me good-bye, and holding out for my admiration a big bunch of field spoils—the half-faded autumnal weeds that dwellers in the country never stoop to gather ; but to her they had colour and form, and grace, and perfume, and rarity—every charm in fact that can exist in flowers.

The wealth of violets and primroses that glorified the lanes in spring has given place now to tall, swaying ferns, dark ivy and frail spears of flowering grass. There has been a long spell of dry weather, and the path lay deep in dust and encumbered with rolling stones. Overhead the sun blazed fervently, and with such unquivering calm that it seemed as if the breezes had all gone to roost in the leafy shelter of the trees ; high or low there was not a whisper of them. But it was very pleasant entering on the ravine where the hidden springs sustain a rank vegetation through the most torrid of summers. On the hedge-banks peeped the first purple-green tufts of heather, and down the long slopes to the brook were marshalled lines

and squadrons of majestic fox-gloves which the children plucked and shouldered sword-wise, until they came to the two great dimples in the sunniest swell of the hill where grows the glossy *Blechnum*, and side by side with it the airy Lady-fern, most graceful of the whole tribe of ferns.

And then we fell to, and dug and dug, while the *blechnum* and my lady clung fast to their native soil, as if reluctant to yield to transplantation, and pleading to be left at liberty in the clear golden air. But all in vain—in vain! Root and frond they were rent away and stowed in capacious baskets as we discussed how they would thrive under a heart-of-London Rectory-wall, and predicted that they would make a perpetual greenness under its murky shadow. The robbery once begun we were ruthless—we knew not when to stop; and, in fact, nothing did stop us but the consideration that we had overloaded ourselves already, and should have much ado to get our spoils home.

Our work was done, but some of us were yet far from weary; so we went to and fro the woods and to and fro the fields, discovering choice young ivy plants, most delicately veined, and wood-sorrel in

patches emerald-green, which, as they were positively of no weight at all, could add nothing to our accumulated burden; and while we wandered, the quite little and weak ones rested in the shade, crowning their fingers with fairy caps and dressing their hats with sylvan wreaths, until when we went back to them their appearance was so gallant and festive that evidently plainer folks must carry the baskets. The sun was declining, and so we trooped through the lanes, under the red light of the sky, with many a pause and rest, till we came to my gate, where we exchanged cheery good-nights and parted. But some of the brightness of my bits of sunshine went in with me and stayed, and kept off the crowd of thronging cares for an hour or two, and helped me to a few philosophical reflections, which may strengthen me to bear them if they come.

Did we profit genuinely by the experience of other persons, or even by our own, thought I, we should very early in life give up rejoicing or disquieting our hearts about what is unsure. But, as it is universal, no doubt it is best that, like children, we should be driven to our imperfectly-conned lesson again and again; that we should have our

smiles and our tears continually diverted by sudden shocks of surprise, and that still, like children, we should have courage left to make for ever new starts to repair false starts; while our capacity for hoping and fearing stays by us to the last throb of the pulse. Half our life is lived in the vain expectation or dread of what never comes to pass. Young, we lay out long before us a pleasant story sunny-bright and flowery-gay with love, sympathy, and tenderness, which is to be our life-story; later, we toil and vaguely trouble in prospect of a dreary volume of labour and care which we believe ourselves doomed to travel through; and when we least dream it God writes an inexorable *finis* on the glowing page, and in a moment takes away the volume that we thought too hard, and gives us quite another task and leaves us to it. By this time we might have learnt that all our planning and all our shying are less than nothing to Him who disposes—but have we? I cannot remember that I ever yet met man or woman so old, dull, and world-weary that he or she had not some ray of forlorn hope still held in front that the faint breath of life kept stirring; and beyond its doubtful attainment a *scheme*.



III.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

RLEW by the familiar scenes of the village, the people at their cottage doors, the little children clustering in knots for play; then came the thick hedges, the tall trees, the silent expanse of fields, and suddenly the dream-like sensations of hurry and confusion left me, and all the reality of life and death stood out distinct and clear. The August twilight was stealing over the rosy flushes of the sky, and a crisp, chill wind rustled in the darkling foliage; heavy wains creaked down the hill; tired reapers and happy, holiday folks were setting their faces homewards; and I, too, was setting my face homewards to the old home three hundred good miles away, and the Angel of God's wrath and Christ's mercy was wending thitherwards too. Should I outstrip him hurrying through the night?

The pier was deserted, and the boat had but few passengers; the lights gleamed in long lines across the sea, and the little fishing cobbles rocked to its swell; the island faded into mist, and the mist into gloom, and then I fell a-thinking of long-ago trials that *she* had soothed, of childish perversities *she* had forgiven, of the toilsome life *she* had lived and yet found full of blessing!

No train till past midnight; and then it rang along the road so fast, so fast through the darkness that soon out of its mystery stole the gray-paced dawn, and shewed me rising fields, and cornstooks, and dim blank woods, and sleeping villages; and then a vision of Babel in the sunrise, the towers of Westminster silvered, the river glittering under the Bridge of Sighs, the vast market-waggons about Covent Garden, with the chaffering eager poor souls watching for the little bargains, the bettering of which must buy the day's bread; then the quiet stately squares, the streets of palaces, and in a doorway two little girls asleep, and a policeman at pause where they lay. "Don't wake them," was my involuntary, inaudible cry; and his step echoed along the flags, and the dark figures still crouched on their stony bed. *She* was

always very pitiful of the poor—always took God's word in earnest, that what was given to them was lent to Him, and should be repaid again—never closed heart or hand against a suppliant, lest perchance she should be denying *Him*.

Forth again through the open country with scarce a pause. Northward the harvest stood uncut; white barley and brown wheat clothing the levels and the shallow slopes, with here and there a patch of stubble, and rich meadows deep in after-math, where the cattle lifted their heads for one amazed moment as our freight whirled by, and then betook themselves again with slow rumination to their affluent pastures.

Six hours, and then the train rolls through the archway under the city-walls, the minster-towers rise against the blue sky, and the bells ring out a merry, merry peal as for a festival. A little while—one long breath it seems—and there is *home*, and the afternoon sun glancing on the open windows!





IV.

GATHERED AND GARNERED.

RIPE with the harvest-sheaves,—ready to be gathered and garnered. Without suffering, without care; without one anxiety for this world or one care for the next; old—all her children grown and flown; her day's-work well done, and the night drawing on. "We must all die," says nurse; "and your mother has lived her full time. It was her earnest desire that when she began to fail, it would please God to spare her pain and take her quickly—and you'll see, dears, He will."

It is like Sunday the week round in her room. The window is wide open, and in our neighbour's garden there is sunny weather and wealth of flowers. Twice a day the minster-bells ring out loud and near, loud and clear—it is all familiar, all like twenty years ago, except that my mother, in-

stead of flitting busy about the house, sits propped in her chair, sometimes smiling and sensible, sometimes wandering in the mazes of memory, and asking those strange vague questions about forgotten things which strike on the heart like a blow.

"Stoop down," says she one golden afternoon; "let me stroke the dust from your hair." Ah! mother, that dust is dust of time—gray hairs not to be swept off by gentle touch of any hand again! She looks sorry, and asks me am I really myself; then adds that she knows my voice though I am changed. But her thoughts have gone back to quite young years; for another day, when I have put on a gay gown, and a bit of bright ribbon to deceive her eye away from faded face and hair, she bids me at good-night, not forget to say my prayers; and when for old sake's sake I kneel and say them. by her, suddenly with clear voice and my very own baby-accent on the long words, she repeats from end to end the little hymn I used to babble at her knees when I was a child.

We had all need cultivate good habits and kindly thoughts, for when strength and sense are lapsing away these remain. My mother will be up and dressed daily; she will have her knitting, her

spectacles, and the Good Book lying on her lap; she takes thought for her household, and wishes to go to church, and declines away so gently and imperceptibly from her interest in this workaday world that there is no pang in the parting. I could fancy, that in her simple soul there is still some idea of setting her children a good example. "Don't fret," says she when she sees tears in my sister's eyes; "I am not afraid to leave you; I trust God will bring you all to me one after the other."

But oh, this mysterious *Death!* This God's doom on Sin! I have never seen its approach before, and though it comes tenderly as Mercy's self, on the mortal face there is, *there is* the seal of punishment, of vague regret, of mute, helpless resignation. The lips murmur, "Thy will be done;" but the soul receives its warning of change with tremulous awe—and is it not most meet? The spirit bows to the stern, just sentence, but the body cannot rejoice in suffering its dire penalty.

What visions are revealed to the eyes of the dying? What voices sound in their ears unheard of us, still far from the shores eternal? What mean those beckonings in the air? Who calls

when my mother answers so quick and clear, "*Yes, I am coming?*" Are those who have gone before sent back through the Valley of the Shadow of Death to bear her company by what we have been used to think a dark and lonely way? Will that way be dark? Will it be lonely at all? or cheered by the greeting of old friends and kinsfolk gathered to welcome a new comer to Christ's kingdom as to a Christmas festival?

In gentle sleep our mother passes away, and for us is left the grotesque-pathetic medley of life and death; the darkened house, the suppressed hurry and confusion of all great changes. The vigil has been long; the strain of it aches in my heart now as it never did while we kept it. I should like to stray out in the sun; I should like to draw a long breath in the pure September air, and feel my natural self again—and *she* would bid me go and be refreshed, I know; but that must not be, says cold custom, till she is laid in mould.

And so we make the last journey all together through the streets when the day looks so garish and the faces are all so blank; where in a narrow way, a wain high piled with harvest-sheaves draws

aside, and stands to the wall, that the other wain with its one shock of ripe corn gathered and garnered for God may pass by solemnly, unstayed. The old burial-ground in the suburbs has long been closed, and the wife and mother must rest apart from husband and child in the populous green cemetery, overshadowed with trees and brightened with autumnal flashes of scarlet and purple flowers—a pretty place, a garden of graves. She would have preferred the familiar, murky parish fold, side by side with those two who belonged to her, but as that desire of her heart cannot be granted, we lay her amongst friends—close by my dear old lady of the tower-cap whose elder, household daughter lies even now sick unto death. Then sound in our ears the gracious words of hope and blessing, and we are left—all our mother's living children standing by her grave, "deep enough for every one." Then drags at our heart the lingering reluctance to go—and the *going*. Can the world ever be quite the same again without her faithful love?

In our Life here there is so much real isolation, and in our Death so much appearance of it that we

do unwisely not to cling to all the Love we can. Of our cherished belongings it is the only good that stays by us to the last, and follows us out of the world—and yet we idly slight it often for much less permanent joys.

Is it the foresight of a forsaken age and a neglected death that makes women crave so hungrily for the natural blessings of children and the family life? There is a pathetic contrast truly between children's tendance and alien service. Last night through the dark and the rain I went to visit that dear old friend, whose face I remember long ago as always kind and cheery let others gloom ever so dark and dull; and over it, by the dim light of the fire, I saw stealing the gray pallor which is the shadow of death. "Your mother has got but a very short start of me, darling!" says she, with wailing, pitiful cry. She is a solitary woman. There are no daughters by her pillow—only a nurse, and one akin, but so heart-stifled with earthly cares that she has no vision of the spiritual life, and no words to speak but words of vexed complaining, which make the sick poor soul often and silently pray that God will not leave her here a burden long.

"Married life has many cares, but single life has no joys," she says presently, and then wanders through an old story that I have heard often before of love denied and hope deferred, and others' selfishness indulged, all ending in too late—*too late!* After that she falls to talking of ourselves as children, tells me reminiscences of my father and mother, and little anecdotes of my early self; and when I must go, she urgently bids me come again soon—*very soon*; and I see her wan face strain after me with a plaintive smile as I go out at the door—never to enter it again until she lies in her coffin, looking so placid in her grave-gear that I could half envy her who has got the loneliness and weariness of living well over.

It is all in keeping with foregone events, that on the morning of her funeral the rain should come down with a *dree* pertinacity, that the early fallen leaves are whirling in drifts over the sodden ground, and that all nature wears a forlorn and desolate aspect. And it is somehow a consolation to myself to tramp the longest way round by the river and the miry lanes, and to stand by in the pitiless storm while she is laid in her grave. Over beyond is my mother's with the new headstone, and already

a rose or two blooming above it, and green violet leaves that will be sweet in spring. This is a perplexed world, and they two have done with it! I am not the only uninvited mourner at the Old Maid's Funeral. With white hair uncovered there stands just within earshot, but apart from the company like myself, a gentleman whose face I remember perfectly since the early days when the good old lady of the tower-cap was alive; and as soon as the service is over, and the others have retired, he recognises me by the pet name I used to bear in those long ago holiday-afternoons, though his name I have quite forgotten; and after a last look into the grave we walk away together under the dripping trees, avowing our mutual affection and respect for the friend of a lifetime who has fared safely through the many stages of a troublesome journey, and is at rest now from all care and toil for ever and ever.

"Death as it is universal cannot be an evil," has said some philosopher, and doubtless there is purpose and mercy in every seeming random stroke of the scythe. When the corn falls fully ripe no heart-cry is very bitter, but what feel we when little

HARNERED.

III

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in the sun after nine
ght? It is God's will—
as children still left for
or Heaven. And what
the tall green blade
ll only, it is God's will
him best. Perchance
leaf, some canker at
id and eaten all, had
ness from the slow



V.

LAST TIMES.

SOME persons are always bent on evading melancholy thoughts by thrusting out of sight every source of them as fast as possible ; but for my part, feelings being ever to me the realest matters of fact, I prefer accepting each experience as it comes, taking its pain or its satisfaction for all they are worth. *Doing* is monotonous routine for most of us, but *suffering* has variety at every recurrence.

“ By great sorrows the heart is protected against small ones, by the water-fall against the rain.” It must have been on this wise with my mother. She was not a woman of many words or of any complaints. What came was by God’s permission, what went was by God’s will. I do not think she ever philosophised over the hardships of her life save in this simple Christian fashion ; and though

to the narrow world outside her home she might seem not to have so *many* causes of thankfulness, yet she was always thankful. It is only ourselves that know what we have been spared. Happiness, she taught us, was not the main pursuit of life, but duty ; and her example went even beyond her precept To do her best and trust God for the result was her visible effort no less than it was her constant counsel and consolation ; and to the very last God redeemed the promises made to those who put their confidence in Him by maintaining in her a quiet heart.

I love to remember her words and ways, sitting here by myself alone in the old home ; for the others are gone—all gone away for *the last time*. To-night the house echoes to no voice, the fire throws no shadow on the wall but mine—unless I except the thronging shadows of the years that are past.

All day I have been busy amongst such things as mothers make relics of—needle-work quite out of date, but never worn, old copy-books, drawings and laborious maps which mine treasured as mementoes of her children, and turned over affectionately many and many a time when they were not by. What to do with them *now*—valueless in

themselves, though to her so very precious ! Over one quaint feminine hoard hardly can I forbear a smile—you would never guess what it is, but it has brought back to me clear as any written memoir could, scenes and seasons, and pleasures and pains which, until I drew the strings of the little silken bag, were as dim and faded as itself. Turned out upon the table its contents looked a mere miscellany of shreds and patches of every colour and quality under heaven ; but after a pause of amazed contemplation, first one familiar pattern detached itself from the mass, and then another, until I perceived distinctly that these meaningless fragments were bits of worn-out dresses sent to our mother when they were new—such as perhaps more daughters than ourselves working amongst strangers enclose in their home-letters to eke out trivial and eventless chat.

Last times ! last times ! how many last times were seen in the dead raiment which rises phantom-like out of the bag of patches ! How showery was the spring-time when this old thing was new ; how wearily lagged the summer days that wore it out ! But good-bye tears that watered no flowers, and good-bye sorrow that never ripened fruit, my heart shall be sore with you no more, no more !

IN THE FALL OF THE LEAF.

“ A moral character is attached to autumnal scenes. The leaves falling like our years ; the flowers fading like our hours ; the clouds fleeting like our illusions ; the light diminishing like our intelligence ; the sun growing colder like our affection ; the river becoming frozen, like our lives ; all bear secret relations to our destinies.”

CHATEAUBRIAND.



I.

WOODS IN OCTOBER.

THERE is a beauty of autumn in these woods which is in some respects far more touching and tender than the beauty of budding Spring. The tall bracken lies crushed and faded down into brown masses, brightened only here and there by a golden gleam cast athwart the russet ruin, and falling on some leaf of richer colour. In sheltered spots lurk still little ambushes of green fronds, driven to their utmost retreat, but making a forlorn protest against the universal decay, though their own outposts are touched already with fire and blood. To-night, perhaps, may come the hoar-frost and the north-wind and cut them off.

Then the fringes of heather by the foot-paths, the delicate purple fringes that were so brilliant a month ago, they also have felt the ice-blast, and

are fallen pale, gray, and dead, save here and there a dainty spike of bells that fairies might ring chimes upon, late blooming, and of a more precious loveliness than any of its early fellows, because it stays when all the pomp and glory and flaunting triumph of the year have gone by.

Amongst the deep exquisite mosses spring the slender bilberry shoots, their glossy leaves and stalks tinged with crimson ; and as I climb a steep, capriciously-curving path, trodden by no licensed woodman, but by boys in quest of birds and butterflies, I see suddenly through a distant opening between the pine-trees a rift of clover, glowing with a pinky violet of indescribable richness and softness in the afternoon sunshine. It is these unexpected glimpses of beauty, these vignettes of Nature's own colouring and setting, that make the charm of wood rambles. I was never on this spot before, and all the familiar expanse of varied country round about falls into new perspective.

A hurdle is not the easiest of climbing, but here is no gate ; I love not retracing difficult steps, and a wilderness of brambles bars the forward way ; therefore over it into the open is my only alternative, unless I can humble myself to turn back, and

I conquer it just at a point where a solitary clump of gorse keeps up its proverbial reputation of never being out of blossom any more than kissing is out of fashion, by shewing a few golden drops still amongst its prickly green.

The birds are silent all, neither is there any stir of insect life; the solemn hush of rest after labour is over the earth. By and by the sky fades from its brightness through rosy blendings of cloud, until above the downs it is a clear, uniform gray. As soon as the sun is gone the air breathes sharp and cold, and the October twilight advances fast.

“Autumn, like a faint old man, sits down
By the wayside weary.”

Nature speaks to us everywhere in parables, but here and now she speaks with her deepest and most pathetic significance. It is an old simile, that of our Life and the Year, and yet it comes to each of us by experiment as a quite new thing. The youth and joyous beauty of Spring have put on the coif of age and pale decay; the thrilling song of hope and love has sunk into a requiem; the leaves that rustled greenly overhead, and were a shadow from the summer heats, rustle now under

foot, and whirl away in forlorn drifts before the wind. Imagination plays some of us fantastic tricks when we begin to taste the bitter sweet of life; we affect a philosophy that we have not earned, and stay our first disappointed feelings with the wise saws that were minted in the fiercest furnaces of mortal anguish and struck with the cold die of truth; but though the east winds of Spring grief are keen, and many a fair blossom of promise drops before their breath, we are yet as far from realising then the gray and sober twilight of failing days as we are from foreseeing autumnal shadows in the gleamy skies of April.

The undertones of those shadows now are soft and lovely, though vivid colour be lacking, and so are the calm pleasures of later life sweet though they glow not with the warm tints of hope. In May the splendour of sunshine almost dazzles our eyes, and the luxuriant overgrowth of flowers confuses them; but in October one gleam on a russet leaf is precious, and one bud in a wilderness is lovely. In youth the heart irradiates the whole promising expanse of life, and discriminates none of its day-by-day joys; when youth is sped, we take minute philosophy for our companion, and begin to learn

the worth and weight of little things. For Youth is always spendthrift of its wealth, while Wisdom economises its scantier treasures, and keeps a firm grip on every golden grain of Time until it has had and enjoyed its full exchangeable value. The richest fruits of the earth are reaped, and the best part of our day's journey lies then behind us ; but if the way in front be not enclosed with " the limited views of intense anxiety," there is a beauty in its serene vistas equivalent to the beauty of woods in autumn, and a grave sense of satisfaction present with us, such as was very rare during the early hours when all was new and untried, and from whatever happiness belonged to *now* we were still eager to hurry forward for a prospect of what greater glory was to bless us *then*.

And if the joys of autumn be of soberer hue than the joys of spring-time, so are its griefs blent with more patience and resigned submission. We have learned with the coming of gray hairs that through life runs a system of compensations, and no common sorrow can now darken our sky to the horizon. We stand higher than in the morning, and have a wider range of view. Wind and frost have thinned the leaves in the October woods, and

experience has pruned away the wild growth of our illusions; our journey thus far has carried us up hill, and be the clouds overhead ever so black, we can yet see towards the sun-setting a gleam of heaven and brightness on their silvered edge.

Night is creeping now with muffled foot-fall from out the ranks of trees; gliding over field and hollow glen and steep hill-side; shrouding the world in its gradual purple gloom. As I draw near the village, here and there the glow-worm spark of a candle begins to glimmer from cottage windows, and the radiance of the fireside shines through an open door, where the house-mother, with two little ones hanging to her gown, watches for her goodman's coming home. He comes with heavy, tired tread, and a faggot of sticks on his back; but casting his burthen down on the wood-heap near-by the gate, he snatches up his youngest child which toddles to meet him, and carries it in his arms to his wife at the door. As they go in and shut it, dark seems to fall suddenly round about the humble roof, and the wind whirls a shower of undistinguishable leaves across the narrow footpath. In the elms of the lane it is piping up shrill and stormy, and as I cross my threshold

the first long swelling gust rolls down from the hills, scout of a wild battalion which will make tempestuous work through the drear midnight both by land and sea ; but within is warmth, light, and shelter, as within the ark of Christian hope there is warmth, light, and shelter against all the despites of fortune and all the adverse gales of fate.





II.

AN AUTUMN SHADOW.

THIS afternoon is very still ; a vague indistinctness lies on the horizon ; the infinite calm blue of the sky is shaded through imperceptible rosy gradations to a deep bank of violet-gray clouds. The foliage on the elms in the lane has been thinned away by the night frosts and the gales of last week, till the few leaves that remain are tinged of golden-brown, crimson, and olive, and through their light screen can be espied the red roof of the church and its low spire against the background of dun-coloured hills.

The garden plots and desolate borders are bare of flowers ; the wind rules them too harshly in autumn for late-blooming posies to prosper. A few half-dyed rose-buds hang still on the veranda, and a sweet violet or two peeps out of a nest of leaves, but that is all. The evergreens are

bright and hopeful, and here and there is a scarlet berry left upon the briars ; but the day, and the time of day, tending towards dusk, are sad and silent, for the pulse of the year is beating low, and dreary November is upon us.

Yet, though the later season of falling leaves be mournful it has its peculiar grace, as everything in nature and the life of man has its obvious or its latent good, though our eyes may never perceive it while here, we can only look "through the glass darkly." In all this decay there is renewal of strength ; in all the losses and bereavements of time there are the seeds sown for eternity. We have need to feel this deeply and truly, or the perplexity of human affairs would prove often too much for our present faith ; and even feeling it, we are tempted again and yet again to ask, *Why, Why?* of God when He works in a mystery past our finding out.

Sorrow has come down with a swoop on a whole province of the north, and the shadow of her mourning garments is over all the land. Crowds throng every city-street ; eyes, wild with want, gleam in each haggard face. Not theirs the guilt of war, the greedy wilfulness of over-speculation,

the short-sighted apathy of neglect—and yet *theirs* the great anguish of personal suffering. *Theirs* the sharp thorn of hunger, the cold hearthstone, the bare walls, the bare head ; and *theirs* the carking care too—the abased spirit, the dejected mind, the broken heart, as well as the dire physical pangs of necessity. To read of it in this dim November weather, with the chill visage of winter darkling beforehand through the fog, makes one's very soul sink !

“Quelque différence qui paraisse entre les fortunes, il y a une certaine compensation de biens et de maux qui les rend égales,” says the moralist. He speaks with decision ; he acknowledges no wavering, no hairsbreadth of unevenness in the scales wherein are weighed the various portions of mankind. My first thoughts refuse to go along with him ; for to superficial observation the world seems very capriciously dealt ; but my second and more earnest reflections pause humbly and inquire. Is the balance so true—so certainly, constantly true as he asserts ? When hunger and the other extreme needs of utter poverty are cast into the one basin, will they not bear it down below the level of the common lot ?

In the midst of ineffectual strivings for enough to eat man only half lives ; and what is his compensation *here* for this dwarfed existence I have thus far failed to see—perhaps there is no compensation for him till *hereafter*, and the philosopher would himself admit the starveling as an exception to his rule. Natural necessity lies within very narrow limits ; but if one pair of hands snatch greedily at the work and profit that are enough for two, somebody must stand idle, and somebody must lack. In these days of excitement and high pressure men are crowded out of the lines, and left standing in dumb, patient helplessness ; watching with famine-gaunt faces the loud turmoil as it seethes and troubles by them ; marvelling where is their place in it, and blindly speculating why God has made more living souls than loaves of bread to feed them. But “bread’s promised and water’s sure,” says the homely proverb-monger, quoting Holy Writ ; and at the worst extremity still we should trust it ; for where meat fails from the lips of God’s poor, it is that the stewards of His charity may come to the rescue, and feed them with the alms of their abundance.

If hard-featured Want has never knocked at a man’s door, never snatched the crust from the

mouths of his famishing children, nor driven him forth houseless and homeless into the night and the storm, *then* the chances are that he has a share of happiness equal to a king's. Given his daily bread, it is enough ; add to that peaceful content, and he is rich as an emperor. His present and common needs supplied, if he be wise he will live on quietly and confidently from day to day ; all the provision and foresight in the world will not guarantee him against the visitation of extraordinary calamity—for God has never yet consented to arm mankind against Himself.

The successful thousands of this generation seem to me to live by machinery rather than by heart-beats. They are wound up and whirr, whirr-rr-r they run down ; often the mainspring snaps, and they remain so much dead-gold with never a pulse in it. Modern competition has done its utmost to abolish breathing-time ; and if here and there an out-of-date philosopher calls a halt and bids men look precisely whither they are going in the head-long rush, few dare pause lest they should be trampled over by those behind ; they acknowledge they are going too fast, and then panting redouble the pace—the best half of them winning

the goal only to die at it. What, I would ask, is success worth that they voluntarily pay for it such a fee as this? One life lived by days, and hours, and seasons is longer than a score crowded into this single frantic heat.

Acquisition is the great, the moving passion of many men. They never appear to know when they have enough. They are indigent in the midst of overflowing coffers; sordid, mean, and miserable, though saturated with money. They may be lavish and luxurious, or they may stint and spare at every turn, but poor men are they one and all, while their eyes gloat covetously on yet ungotten gains, and their hands clutch at every bit of coin that can by hook or by crook be gathered into their pouches. It is good use and enjoyment, not mere possession, that make men effectually rich; and thus the balance strikes true between the oft-envied goldster, and those moderate folks who with little pelf have yet plenty and to spare.

Under the shadow of this sad autumn will many proud crests go down. Already shrinks the wealth of good men and mean men, and on their ruin are

rising to sudden prosperity merchants unknown amongst their order until opportunity shewed them a short cut to fortune across the common calamity ; swift they have taken it, and are *made men* to-day who yesterday had nothing. The wheel goes round, and they who were uppermost are in the dust ; and with them lie crushed multitudes who were of their following ; whom their fire warmed, whom their bread filled ; and now that the hearth is cold, and the board bare, shall they all go starve together, and Christians and countrymen suffer it to be ?

Not so ! The whole nation is moved to helpful sympathy as if but one heart animated it, and already brotherly-kindness is bringing a good out of this great evil which will be remembered to excellent purpose in the darker days that may be to come. For it is not yet mid-winter, nor the heaviest of the cloud, nor the bitterest of the wild winds of adversity. This is but the beginning of sorrows—the wailing echo of distant war that we hear ; and though many may perish in the bloodless battle of destitution, we are never at the worst while we have peace at home.

Prophets and teachers stand amazed at the mag-

nitude of the distress, and amongst the helpless crowds ask almost as helplessly, What shall we do? Why not do what Christ has bidden? provide for the present day and let the morrow take thought for the things of itself. When the stupor of sudden fall is over, singly and in families, by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, those who are too many for the weakened cities to bear will take up the remnants of their devastated homes and go abroad to people the waste places of the earth. It always has been so. Men are hard to move while they live at ease; only through the urging of an extreme necessity will they forsake the land of their birth. Famine, pestilence, persecution—visitations of God and scourges of violent rulers come, and drive them from the familiar country out into the wilderness, there to lay the foundations of future nations and to build up a distant prosperity.

“The thing that hath been it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time which was before us.”



III.

UP A STEP-LADDER.

IT is midway in November—month of short days and dark nights, of mist and rain and heavy fog, but this morning rose brisk and clear as an ideal Christmas. The hoar-frost whitened the downs, the meadows, the garden-bushes; the span of lawn was vivid green and glittering under the early sun, which had melted the ice-crystals from every blade, and changed them into gems of dew. The bare tops of the elms were populous with rooks, and a twittering of unseen birds came from the covert of every bush. Now that the leaves are fallen I can see far up the lane lying between the Manor-meadow and the low slip of glebe. But it is very deserted this afternoon; there is nothing stirring either up or down, either for work or for play. The world has dropped asleep—dead trance has fallen upon the day. I love

some movement in a landscape. A human interest enhances the charm of the fairest picture. The waggoner's whistle in the distance is pleasant, or his cheering word to his horses. Even the bay of the watch-dog up at the Farm is better than this deep, oppressive silence—oh, hush! the Passing-Bell again.

This has been a sickly season in our village and everywhere. Poor Georgie lies still on his painful bed, wasted, feeble, and wan, but the brisk little baby is gone, and her cot is turned from the fire-side to the wall. Fanny Marshall's twins are thriving, but alas, for the chubby wee men who were sucking their thumbs in corners on that spring-day when I saw them first! Two are dead—dead and buried. The second only last Friday. I met their father and mother coming home from the grave alone—he sad and silent, she bitterly, bitterly weeping; her decent black gown trailing in the mire, all the careful thrift of common times forgotten in her grief. She loves her children—no woman more passionately, less wisely.

And little Willie Robins, when will he be on his feet again, and able to work? Ever so long ago I

missed his shrill whistle as he used to come day by day, toiling up the rough road with the heavy baker's basket at his back, and saw that he had been superseded by another boy, much smaller than himself, and of a preternaturally grave countenance. One afternoon I waylaid this boy, and inquired what had become of Willie. He said he didn't know. Had he got a better place? He didn't know? Was he gone to school? He didn't know. Was he poorly? He didn't know. In fact he knew nothing, so I gave him a ha'penny for the information, and let him labour on, wondering how in the world he did it.

Willie does not belong to my class at school, but his two big brothers do; and when we met on the following Sunday, I renewed my inquiries for my merry little friend, and was told that he had got the fever—the *fever* in our village meaning something generated of damp houses, over-crowding, bad drainage, insufficient water, and perhaps insufficient food.

I always experience a reluctance, difficult to overcome, in going to any new place unless pre-assured of a welcome. Were I ill, I should feel inexpressibly annoyed to have strangers coming

about me with tracts and things to eat, and what I should not like myself, I am chary of inflicting on other people. But Willie is a favourite of my ancient Dinah's; she admires him as the only boy she never had to bid shut the garden-gate; and when I informed her of his calamity, she immediately proposed a delicate pudding, made it, and put it in a basket with a few other little matters applicable to the case, and sent me off to see him.

Our feudal forefathers must surely have dreaded the influence of sunshine and fresh air upon the temper of their serfs, if we may judge from the sites selected for their dwellings. Wherever they could turn their blank walls on a sweet prospect, and hide them in a hole they did it. Serfdom is abolished, but a few of its accidents survive even hereabouts. All the old stone thatched cottages are sunk below the level of the road and buried in bushes. Very picturesque they are outside, but of their wholesomeness the less said the better. There are several clusters of three and four choked in behind more modern and flimsy houses, where one would expect to find only a cartshed. These relics of a past generation stand square, strong and low,

with broad mullions to the windows and tiny diamond panes; they are not likely to fall down of themselves for another century or two, but they cry aloud to be removed as a stigma and heartsore on the present age. Unfortunately these places have commonly passed into the hands of small proprietors whose poverty stops their ears to every argument of progress and improvement. While they can levy half-a-crown of rent weekly on a hovel not fit to house a dog, they will hardly be hindered from doing it by the phantoms imaginative folks protest they see hanging about each hungry hearth and reeking threshold.

My expedition in quest of Willie carried me a step down from the village street, down a steep, unpaved cartway, past an immense mound of agricultural enrichment; down a sloppy footpath between currant-bushes, bearing innumerable rags of clothing but no leaves, down a series of jagged stepping-stones, and finally landed me in a miniature quagmire at the open door of his home. Just inside were five small dots of children, four of them "playing at ladies," and the fifth, a curly-headed urchin of about three years old, enacting the part of audience at the comedy. One of the four, a

blue-eyed maiden, rising seven, and a previous acquaintance of mine, immediately detached herself from the rest of the group, advanced, dropt a bob-curtsey, and then turned sharply round to her companions, and asked, Where were their manners? Their manners were instantly displayed in three more bob-curtseys, but curly-locks proved refractory, retired behind his largest little sister, and peeped at my basket round the corner of her elbow, while my blue-eyed damsel gravely apologised for him as being "only little Robert"—too young yet to have any manners.

And we all stood and stared at each other, the children quite at home under the circumstances, myself feeling awkward that I had not a second basket to give up to plunder, until I was recalled to my situation by hearing blue-eyes communicate my name and place of abode to her next neighbour, when I asked if they knew where Willie's mother was. Immediately they all chorused forth, "She's gone out ironing at Mrs Dent's." I then asked where was Willie; to which they simultaneously replied, "He's up there in his mother's bed." Following the direction of their pointing fingers, I observed an almost perpendicular step-ladder, the

foot of which was directly opposite the doorway, and the head without any circumlocution in a loft, where I could see hanging the best coat Henry has worn while attending Sunday school for two years past.

“Will you go up and see him!” said blue eyes, and the biggest girl, who might be of the mature age of nine, darted forward to pilot the way. But I was shy of that step-ladder, and suggested the expediency of my seeing “mother” if she was to be got at ; on which all the children, except Robert, executed agile manœuvres across a plot of blighted cabbages, and vanished round a corner, while he and I improved our acquaintance by continuing to stare at each other. He was not a pretty child, but he was very quaint. My fancy grew him up, and equipped him in a white smock, corduroys, and immense boots, without an effort. He had taken his stand full in front of me now, sturdy legs apart, hands behind him, head up, brows depressed, and sloe-black eyes, full of stolid, wary inspection. Such a droll little watch-dog! If I had tried to decamp, perhaps he might have given tongue and stopped me ; but while I stood still he moved never a muscle. After the lapse of a few minutes the

girls returned as they went, followed by "mother," looking as if she was thankful to see me, though I could not remember ever to have seen her before.

She was a pretty, tender woman, of not more than two or three and thirty, with soft brown eyes, delicate features, and dark hair. All her clothing was clean, and whole, and decent; and when little Robert butted at her with his curly-pate, he was taken up, kissed, and cashiered with his two sisters into the house-place, while their playfellows scampered away to their own homes. She then gave me her account of Willie's illness, both of us standing outside the threshold. He had been very bad, she said, and ought to have been in his bed a week before he was, but he had got a turn now, and was on the mend, though very weak—would I go up and see him?

It was my destiny to mount that step-ladder, so up I stumbled into the loft, with a pallet-bed in it, and the Sunday wardrobe, and a thin mattress stretched on the floor; then through a doorway without a door into a twelve-foot square room, where, "on his mother's bed," lay Willie—or Willie's shadow. He was wide awake, watching a ray of sunshine that had found its way in at the low

lattice, and quivered restlessly to and fro the wall ; but as I drew near his pillow, he turned on me a pair of great pathetic eyes, and murmured faintly, "A little better." He fancied I asked him how he did. His hearing was quite gone, and his mother half feared the loss might be permanent, though the doctor had told her his deafness arose from debility, and would pass away as his strength returned. While we talked, Willie turned his wistful eyes slowly from the sunshine to my face, and from my face to the sunshine, and then to his mother's, and asked for drink. She went away to warm him a drop of milk, and left us together. Heigho ! thought I, how hard is the life of the working poor when evil days befall them !

The room was as pure as whitewash and scrubbing could make it ; everything about the bed was scrupulously clean ; the old chest of drawers was covered on the top with a white cloth, as was also a rough deal box by the wall, which served as a table. Upon it stood a bottle of doctor's stuff, with a glass and spoon, disposed ornamentally in connexion with a copy of the *British Workman*, a hymn-book, and a Bible. On the walls, fastened up with pins, were some rudely-coloured scriptural

prints, a few missionary tract pictures, and in one corner, above the head of another mattress on the floor, was the Lord's prayer in large type. Bathed in the sunshine of the window were three plants, green and fresh, and though the room was very low it was not close, because of the current of air blowing up from the open house door.

When Mrs Robins returned with the milk, Willie drank it eagerly ; and the pudding being extracted from the basket, he ate a portion of that with an enjoyment pleasant to watch. Having finished it, he stretched out his arm, and looked at his mother. " He wants you to see how thin his arm is, ma'am," she explained ; and rolling up his nightgown sleeve, she shewed me a weak little skeleton limb that will carry no more bread-baskets for many a long day to come. She then sat down by his pillow, put her arm round him, and made him lean against her while she gave me further particulars of his illness ; how good he was, how little hope there had been for him at one time, but how the doctor says now he will come round nicely if she can give him strengthening food. She has spent many a sixpence for him, but cannot get what he ought to have ; he likes eggs best, but must not eat

more than one a day, and he is getting hungry now—besides, eggs are three ha'pence a-piece. The doctor had recommended arrow-root and broth, which I volunteered to supply, and then it occurred to me to ask if the fever was infectious. She believed I had better not stay too long; so having fulfilled my mission I came away, bidding Willie good-bye, with the foolish remark that I was sure he was growing, and that the fever would make a man of him, which luckily he could not hear. And then I followed his mother down that difficult step-ladder, typifying, after a fashion, the make-shift, perilous way by which poor Willie and the like of him climb up from the exposed threshold of infancy to the obscure bare loft of old age.

I carried home to Dinah my report of what a wan little shadow her favourite was become, and the same day she made a pitcher of excellent broth, and left the meat in it; and when submitting it to my taste for approval, she assured me that if the lad's mother had any management in her, she would freshen it every day, and it would keep and fit him a week—an intimation which she also conveyed to Henry when he came for it. But

when I went down the village, long before the week's end, to see the poor child again, his mother told me he could only take it two days ; for what was left after that turned sour.

I achieved the step-ladder a second time. Willie was still in bed, and still as deaf as a stone, and looking, I thought a shade duller and more pallid than before ; but there was no sunshine on the white-washed wall that day, and the drizzling rain slipped mistily like a curtain over the glass. Still his mother said fondly as she put the thin scattered hair off his forehead, "He mends a little—yes, ma'am, I'm sure he mends a little;" and then she added that the doctor said if he could have some jelly made of cow-heel or calf's-foot it would be more strengthening for him now than arrow-root or broth. I promised that he should have what he needed, and with a consideration for which I secretly thanked her, she replied, "I can prepare the feet myself, ma'am, and if I get them as they are you will only have to pay a shilling the set; but if you don't name it, Mrs Briskett will do them, and they will cost you half-a-crown."

When I told Dinah the fate of her broth which was to last a week, she grew wroth, and exclaimed,

"Willie's mother's a shiftless body, or else she's got no keeping-place. Did she let that good nut-ton waste? It would ha' been a dinner for 'em all. What sort of a house is it, missis?" I could not satisfy her curiosity, for I had then only seen the place into which the outer-door opens—a sort of scullery where a few tubs and pans appeared to live, and where the floor was the bare ground set with large pebbles. The family living-room I rightly conjectured to be below the bedroom where Willie lay. "That scullery's larder, pantry, wash-house an' all, I'll be bound," rejoined Dinah. "Folks is better off i' our parts. But I can't abide waste, an' if t' bairn's mother can't keep things as they should be kept, she'd best have 'em little by little every day as he wants 'em. I should like to know how she means to manage them feet—I've half a mind to go after 'em myself."

A day or two later I paid Willie another visit, and while waiting at the open door I glanced round the scullery and concluded from the appearance of things in general that Dinah's shrewd guess at the many purposes it served was correct. Before my survey was complete Mrs Robins looked out from the kitchen, and to my great satisfaction

informed me that Willie was downstairs for the first time. I was accordingly ushered into the house-place, where he was sitting on a stool within a deep chintz valance, hung where a mantel-shelf is commonly fixed. The chimney was a wide open blackened space ; there was no range, no oven, no boiler—nothing but a handful of fire on the stones, kept from being scattered about by three bricks set one upon the other at each side and about a foot apart. Fuel is very costly in our village, and the fire burnt slowly ; so Willie crouched down to it, looking much less comfortable than when he lay in his mother's bed ; while opposite to him and dead asleep sat his father, a tall, powerfully-built carter, who, his wife whispered, had only just got home after being out all night leading coals from the landing up to the store. Willie was no better of his deafness yet, but he was coming round. Oh ! what a painful process that coming round looked over that starved scrap of fire !

The kitchen had the same decided features of cleanliness under difficulties, of neatness and attempt at ornament, as the room up the step-ladder. On a rude deal table, home-made, and by no skill-

ful carpenter, was the week's washing, ironed and folded. In the window-sill was the family library, consisting chiefly of brown old books, contents unknown, but outwardly of a religious appearance, with a few plants intermixed to give them an air of liveliness. The floor was paved with worn, uneven stones, set in the clay, and the walls were the unplastered blocks whitewashed. As I looked out from the window into the dull day, which had but just ceased raining, I saw the sloppy foot-path inclining down to the cottage, all the water draining off to settle in its moist corner. I do not know whose property it is, nor what it costs a week; but whatever it costs in money it will cost enormously more in health and strength, and possibly in children's lives, before it will get pulled down as unfit for human habitation—which it is. But Willie's mother had no thought of complaint; if she said a word it was of somebody's kindness, and it was not for me—who could not alter—to suggest a grievance where none was felt; so I conveyed myself quietly away, leaving the worn-out father of the sad little family fast asleep.

I have got over the dread of feeling myself an in-

truder in Willie's home, and yesterday I found my way there again. The cabbage-garden and the stones before the entrance were not decorated with the dots of girls enacting ladies. The outer door stood open, but the inner one was shut; and while I knocked and waited, I heard a childish wail of suffering, than which I know no sound more sad. Our Rector was there, and as he came out I entered, and saw Willie sitting on his stool within the valance, and a wicker cradle on the stones beside him, in which lay sturdy little Robert—sturdy no longer, but tossed and tumbled and sleepless with pain. Their mother's eyes were red with weeping or watching, or both; but in answer to my needless question if the little one was ill, she only said in her natural way—which was neither patient nor plaintive, but simply acquiescent in what was, as if she had no idea it either could be or ought to be otherwise—"Yes, ma'am, he's got the fever too; he began three days ago." And as the pitiful, inarticulate wail continued, she lifted him in her arms, held his curly head against her neck, and kissed him until it ceased. His big black eyes wore a very different expression from the shrewd twinkle with

which they peeped round his sister's elbow at my basket a fortnight since. He did not know me—knew nothing, I think, but the soothing warmth and tenderness of his mother's caresses.

She gave me a chair to sit down, and sat down herself, nursing him in her lap, where he lay quiet enough. She could not get any rest with him at nights, she said, but did I not think Willie was getting on? He had been out a minute or two in the sun, father helping him, for he could not stand by himself, and his boots were too heavy for his thin little feet. I offered to give him a superannuated pair of my own, which she gladly accepted; and as she talked on I felt that she deferred to me and consulted me, as if I knew anything or were anything besides her. Why, all my speculations and stories of struggle and suffering are mere shreds and patches of phantoms compared with her bare and bitter experience of life!

The two little girls were silently busy at the table, ironing. I inquired of them if they often burnt their fingers, an idea which they repudiated with emphatic head-shakings. "It is their doll's clothes; it keeps them quiet and makes them

handy," said their mother ; on which they smiled and displayed some wonderful bits of rag, the property of a much-abused but much-cherished wooden image now sitting unclothed on the centre pile of books in the window-sill. The fire was a little brighter—no doubt the Rector brightened it—and Willie had not quite such a wan and weary look on his lean face. He watched his mother and myself intently as we talked, and though he could not hear a word he could apparently raise his mind to guess what we were saying ; and perhaps his deafness may be esteemed a blessing while it saves him from his poor little brother's suffering cry.

This is not poverty under its worst aspect ; it is very, very far from that. There is no drunken husband or lazy wife to waste the earnings of labour ; there are industry, thrift, cleanliness ; a successful struggle to be good, honest, pious, decent, orderly, under very hard conditions. There is no special want. There are regular wages, and not bad wages ; there is the father toiling night or day ; there are two boys at constant work, and a good mother able and willing to make them a good home ; yet all the possibilities of health, and

natural growth, and every-day comfort are defeated in a dwelling which the most scrupulous care can never render what a dwelling of human creatures ought to be. It is a pest-house rather, in which fever will always be at war with youth and strength, and always getting the victory.



IV.

AN OLD IDEA NEW SET.

WE have had a week of genuine November weather, and this has been again one of the stillest, grayest, dullest of days. As I walked up to the turnpike this morning the purple hedges dript with moisture, and rime lay white upon the withered grasses of the banks. The sea was obliterated, the downs were hidden in a stagnant mist. It had not the heart to freeze, yet the damp was colder and more penetrating than frost. There were scores of lambs in the manor-meadow bleating mournfully. Poor little things! they seem nothing akin to November; why don't they wait until April—as lambs used to do—when there are daisies out, and sunny long evenings under leafy trees? This afternoon the skeleton trees shewed weirdly magnified through the mist, like dream-trees, all strange and unreal.

as if another moment and they might be gone! I can very well recall the time when I loved the wailing winds of late autumn, the last leaves shivering down from the boughs, the red ripeness of the hedge-berries with all their melancholy suggestions, far better than the blooming outburst of spring with all its promise. It is not so now. The Fall of the Leaf feels what it is—the season of decay and decline, and the season of special hardship to the poor, when sickness knocks loud at many a cottage door, and makes many a cold hearth desolate.

It is a fashion in this nook of the world to put a window over the parlour fire-place—a cosy arrangement, which allows one to enjoy the comfort of the hearth and the last gleam of twilight together. But this afternoon it was all twilight, and by four o'clock it was dark; yet, mindful of my dear mother's old customs, I would not have in candles, but sat thinking by the fitful glow of the fireside.

As long as I could see to read I read, and the last bit of print I could discern was a sarcastic paragraph directed against the old idea, new set, of women learning and practising the science of medi-

cine. "An' wha' for no?" said I, provoked at its supercilious tone. "They used to practise surgery, and brew drinks, and tend us coming into the world and going out; what ails them that they are not as trustworthy as their fore-mothers?" That was the utterance of my sudden perversity, but the issue of my maturer thinking is like unto it.

It can hardly be denied that some women have a strong bias towards the healing art. Witness their despotic quackeries amongst the poor. But a little knowledge taken in combination with a large amount of prejudice and presumption is a very dangerous thing in their hands. Weak people may become perfect martyrs to the crotchety experiments of their female friends, if they have no refuge near in the shape of a doctor. I have known a kind-hearted lady refuse for a fortnight to supply an old woman with medicine for her cough because the prescription contained laudanum, and just at that juncture she happened to have taken up a prejudice against the drug—with what cost of suffering and sleepless nights to the old woman anybody who has an asthmatic tendency may imagine. And I have seen another insist on the application of a Castile-soap plaster

to a varicose ulcer on the same poor body's ankle, and express only a mild, incredulous surprise when informed of the agony she had unwittingly inflicted. She evidently thought the leg to blame that it did not suit the plaster, and would fain have had its misuse persisted in, even when the surgeon, who became imperatively necessary after its application, assured her that it had already achieved serious mischief. If, with her charitable instincts, her leisure, her money, and her wholesome desire to do good, she had combined a thorough understanding of the science she aspired to practise, what a beneficial person she might have been ! Everybody knows some such tender soul amongst his acquaintance whose lips overflow with advice at a hint of sickness, who is ready to prescribe for every ailment under the sun, and to administer decoctions of her own with lavish generosity. She has her pet specifics, and every few months she adopts a new love ; for the most salient feature in irregular feminine practice is its extreme fickleness. Arguing from this common trait developed chiefly in village ladies holding posts of semi-official authority, it appears as though nature had intended some women to devote themselves to the study of

medicine ; and perhaps, on the whole, it might be better that they should study it than practise it without study—for practise it they always did and always will.

I imagine that it is from the most competent and intrepid of those who under favourable circumstances would have recruited the ranks of domestic teachers that has arisen of late years, the vague outcry on the right of women to invade certain provinces of labour which modern custom has assigned to men. Quite recently a young lady has advanced a claim to be admitted as student to the lectures of the medical professor in one of the northern universities, and her claim has been disallowed. If she were to poll all the matrons in England, I cannot but think that ninety-nine out of every hundred would assure her that it has been disallowed most advisedly and most properly. For if it be expedient that women should apply themselves to medical science, it is surely expedient that they should have their own schools ; and if they be in earnest they will create them. None but women of large mental power are fit for the undertaking, and none but women of high moral tone and stout nerves will ever carry it through ;

such women may safely be trusted to be of more help than hindrance in any community, and in country places where no doctor has thought it worth his while to settle they might be extremely valuable. The popular voice is certainly against them now, and the confidence necessary to their success will not be won in a day, or in a year, or in ten years ; nevertheless, everything must have a beginning, and it is only through long patience and honest labour that small beginnings arrive at good endings.

A lady-physician profoundly experienced and in full work is rather a quaint idea ; but I could fancy her a very pleasant person—tolerant, sympathetic, large-hearted, quick of discernment, easy to talk to, and very desirable amongst women, children, and all of her own sex mentally afflicted. But to arrive at this dignity she must not begin by making herself conspicuous. There must be an entire absence of fuss in her demeanour ; she must learn unobtrusively, yet thoroughly. She must have a sound heart, a strong head, and a full purse—yes, a full purse. It is not the poor young gentlewomen who fly for bread to the school-room that need ever aspire to be healers of the sick.

That vocation must be followed for love, pity, and charity, rather than for gain ; because a woman will most likely have grown gray before she has proved her skill sufficiently to make it support her. I believe her services would be readily adopted when confidence in their efficiency was secured.

Imagine her presiding tenderly over Hospitals for Sick Children, over Village Infirmaries, over Asylums for Insane Women. Imagine her counsel to the weak, disappointed, desponding, of her own sex, given with the deep sympathy of personal knowledge, yet with the voice of authority. How many might she comfort, cure, and rouse who now go languishing, miserable, and misunderstood !

The longer I think of it the more practicable does the novel idea of the lady-physician seem. Fifty years hence she may be an institution, and a most precious one—we may even come to wonder how we ever did without her. The idea has begun to work, and if it be a good and true idea it will not stand still where it is. Its progress or its decay lies, as I honestly believe, amongst women themselves, and amongst women only. Whatever they can do well, sooner or later, they always get leave to do.



V

A DISSERTATION ON PETS.

I MEANT to be idle this morning over a new book—directly after breakfast with a story-book, but just as I was going to possess myself of my favourite chair, I found Cosy had been beforehand with me, and was coiled fast asleep amongst the cushions. I had not the heart to wake him up, nor is it ever possible to me thoroughly to enjoy an idle book at home except in that particular idle chair; so I laid it down, and began to apply myself to my proper work, when suddenly it occurred to me to think what tyrants pets and weak creatures are allowed to be. How easily was I turned from my intention of being amused; and yet to be amused is as good a thing in its way as to do a duty. I am convinced that to enjoy is to be wise; and the mood to enjoy is not so common that we should slight it when

it comes upon us. But Cosy looked so perfectly happy that without a second thought I postponed my pleasure to his comfort. His little nose was healthy pink, his countenance was bland and sweet as honey, his velvet feet were washed silvery in the morning dew, and there was a long thorny bramble entangled in his bushy tail which revealed the secret of his hedge-and-ditch scamperings of last night. He was tired, and repose lay soft as down on every limb. He had composed himself to rest in the calm assurance that he would be left undisturbed until dinner-time, when he would get up, stretch himself, and mew—some people's pets are too polite to mew, but mine never are. If Cosy wishes for anything he asks for it, and asks until he gets it. He *will* be attended to, no matter in what company; but he is honest to the backbone, and we cannot expect to have every virtue combined in one individual.

There is as great diversity in the characters of cats as of Christians. It is not everybody, however, who has the philosophic insight displayed by Mons. de Montaigne when he says: "Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sçait si elle passe son temps de moy plus que je ne fois d'elle? nous nous entrete-

nons de singeries reciproques ; si j'ay mon heure de commencer ou de refuser, aussi à elle la sienne." I should think so ! my opinion is that pets always regard their protectors as the inferior person. Cosy is never playful and pleasant at *my* bidding, but only at his own inclination. I am much more ready to respond to his vagaries than he to acknowledge my caresses. If I stroke him at a wrong moment, he half opens a drowsy pair of eyes, buries his nose in his paws, and goes persistently to sleep again ; but if *he* wants to be amused he will push his head under my arm, jump atop of my newspaper, and shrill out his impatience in a yell that would alarm me if I did not know that it is only his temper ; and if he misses Dinah from the kitchen at an unusual season he will seat himself on the mat at the stairfoot, and lift up a voice of loud, long lamentation which never fails to bring her down, asking peevishly, "Eh, deary me, an' what's the matter now?" when he flourishes his tail, and is appeased. "You *are* a master, you are," says the old woman, and humbles herself to him like a very slave.

Since I read that charming anecdote of Doctor Johnson and his favourite Hodge, I have thought

him a much pleasanter man than I ever discovered him to be from the study of his Dictionary. That he should go out and buy oysters for Hodge, and that Hodge should scramble up his waistcoat, and look out of countenance when he heard his kind master say that he had had cats he liked better than himself, is touching and beautiful—for I am certain Hodge *did* hear, and that he understood too. And a very fit object of the sage's contempt was that young gentleman of good family who ran about the town shooting cats. I hope they haunted him, and that their ghosts howled miserably on his tiles ever after.

I confess to a warm affection for the feline race myself; but as pets I think they are unlucky. Cosy is my fourth love within ten years. My first treasure was Charlie, a lovely lady, sleek, fair, and sociable, as became her descent from the Rector's stately tortoise-shell. Her training was accomplished under difficulties, but it was accomplished with signal success; and she grew up as graceful and amiable as any lady I ever knew. By the judicious distribution of tobacco, traps were removed from her favourite woodland, and she lived

to present me with an exquisite snowdrop of a kitten, christened Toby on the spot. But one fatal evening she was missing. I sought her high and sought her low, and at last I heard her voice answering to mine in pitiful, pleading anguish from within a dreadful place where there were rats. When I opened the door, she sprang to me, uttering an almost human cry, but was dragged back by a wicked machine hanging to her leg. I could not unclinch it, but I took her and it up together in my dress-skirt, and carried her to the back-door, and sat down on the step crying. The fat butler saw us from his pantry-window, and came quickly out; he wrenched the rusty machine open, and set her broken limb at liberty, but said with husky sympathy he was afraid she would have to be shot. And then I took her up to Toby on the sofa in my school-room, and she washed him and nursed him, and sang her mother-song over him, every now and then looking up at me with plaintive eyes of entreaty for the help and healing I could not give. Oh, the dumb, pathetic patience of a suffering animal! And by and by came up game-keeper, and shook his head, and was sorry; then he bade me bring her out myself, as I should lift

her easier, and she might be dangerous for anybody else to touch; so I brought her out into the Bank amongst the green trees, and the hyacinths and daffodils that were springing, and the man took his gun, and in a moment she was quiet, poor pussy, and out of her pain. It is ever so long ago, but Charlie is still to my thinking the very pink and perfection of cats.

For love of her I brought up little unweaned Toby by hand. It was a very queer process. He had not learnt to lap when he was bereaved of his mother, and the only way of teaching him that I could devise was to tilt him face foremost into cream; and having licked his lips and found it nice, he presently developed a very proper aptitude for lapping, and grew up into a king-cat of gigantic stature and ferocious strength. We went on our travels together, but being come into a town where the smoke disagreed with his health and complexion, in an evil day he was consigned to the custody of a carrier's wife, who promised him the run of a farm-yard until I could give him a home in the country again. From that tragical hour to this my eyes have never beheld him; and so far as I am concerned, his fate remains shrouded in im-

penetrable mystery. I wrote and wrote and wrote, but that carrier's wife was dumb, and never answered me.

For some years after Toby's catastrophe I would have no pet. I thought of a dog several times, but I like every creature to enjoy its life naturally, and dogs require so much to make them happy—they want long runs in all sorts of weather, they want strictly limited diet, they want the distraction of fighting; and though all my neighbours have dogs more or less pugnacious, anybody whose dog beat my dog would become at once obnoxious to me—*very*. Birds again—I like to hear them in the trees, in the hedgerows, in the woods; I like to hear them in the garden—even the blackbirds and the sparrows—but to see them shut up behind bars ever so finely lacquered and gilded pleases me not. Puss is the true domestic animal for the spinster's fire-side; one must have something pettable to speak to; something to tease and be teased by. I was open to consolation in that kind for a considerable time before I found it; but at last I had given to me my most entertaining Tricksy, whose antics were the inspiration of many a laugh, and the amusement of many an idle interval between work

and play-work. What a kitten he was for fun! It would have made a cynic smile to see him prank himself at the glass, the pretty, sprightly dandy! But I will not dwell on his fascinations, for he is gone—dead and gone—and there lies Cosy, the reigning sovereign. We forfeit the right openly to mourn an old love when we have adopted a new one; still, though Cosy is a very desirable cat and has merits peculiar to himself—beauty and blue eyes, for instance—and though I would not for the world hurt his feelings by making invidious comparisons, I must say that he has not Tricksy's winning ways and *spirituel* airs and graces. Tricksy had a vein of humour and originality. He was a cat of honour and renown, highly respected by all the cats in the village, but Cosy is commonplace; he has low tastes, and he returns often from the midnight affray with nose scratched, ears torn, and swollen brows awful to behold. Tricksy was always drawing-room company, but Cosy has more than once, twice, or thrice had the door shut in his face. They were own brothers, but the dissimilarity that we often observe existing between brothers of the human family exists quite as evidently between them.

Yet I am fond of Cosy too, and get very anxious

if he be missing at meal times, to which he comes on ordinary occasions as punctually as clock-work. It is not a month since he cost me a reward of half-a-crown, when, after an absence of six and thirty hours, he was discovered in the cellar at the brewery *after rats*—as if *that* were a fit diversion for a lady's pet! Liking must go very much by habit, I am sure. There was the returned prodigal smelling mouldy, looking fierce, dishevelled, and hungry as a hunter who has caught nothing, yet Dinah rejoiced over him with tears in her eyes, and I watched him make up for his two lost dinners with a tender interest he neither appreciated nor deserved; for the excitement of sport had entered into his blood; and as soon as he had eaten enough he was off again, the graceless scamp! and Dinah excused his shameless behaviour as being no more than natural; indeed, in her delight at his restoration—for she had given him up as lost for ever—she would have excused anything!

On the strength of two or three well-worn anecdotes of cruel persons who have cherished dumb pets, it has been argued that to love animals is a sign of indifference to humanity—that the heart

which would melt at the moan of a dog or cat, would be hard to the cry of a child or to the suffering plea of the poor and miserable. But the argument will not hold. To be negligent of the well-being of whatever depends on us is simply to be selfish ; and the selfish person who will let an animal pine for food, or who, to save trouble, will cause it to be put out of the way the moment it is ailing, would be much more likely to leave sick kinsfolk to the unwatched tendance of hired nurses and to despatch spoilt children to vex strangers, than the person who acknowledges and fulfils the obligation of caring for the helpless favourite that has been useful and amusing in its hours of health. It is either Parson Dunsford himself or some one of his friends in council who says that when account is taken elsewhere of our doings here, a bit of kindness to a destitute dog may be the only good action recorded of a day that we deemed at the time sufficiently well-spent. I once saw a lady go into a butcher's shop, and buy a scrap of meat and carry it to a forlorn beast lying half-starved and shivering in the entrance to a narrow court ; and I am sure she was the very woman to go down the court and into the squalid houses with bread both for this

life and the other. And if ever I observe a surly fellow kick and cuff his cur, or vengefully double his whip and shorten it for a savage blow at the head of his jaded and overloaded horse, nothing would convince me that his womenkind at home do not weep and tremble under the yoke of a detestable tyrant. Of all vices cruelty is to me the most abhorrent and the most contemptible. And yet I have heard it excused in the young, especially in boys—as if the torture of the weak and helpless had anything to do with the great virtue of courage, instead of being as it is the sure token of a bad and a cowardly nature, of which everybody would do well to beware.

I like to see moderation and discretion in the adoption of pets. There are persons who take them up on impulse, indulge a brief caprice of fondness, tire of them, and give them away here, there, anywhere, to be rid of them. Defend me from the intimacy of such fickle, faithless folks! they would change an old friend for a new one just as readily. I can better understand the close undemonstrative people whose reserved temper keeps them aloof from the familiar society of their kind, and who find in the mute fidelity of a dog com-

panionship enough for all life through. Emily Brontë was one of these strange, solitary natures. She loved the wild top of the moor, the blast on the bleak hill-side, the mournful desolation of wintry woods; she craved for no human sympathy, no human attachment; Keeper's dumb adoration sufficed her stern, Spartan spirit. She seems to have lived, suffered, and died isolated by will and deed from all affection save his. These cold, un-giving, unloving beings make sad heart-break around them, and it is well for the world they are rare.

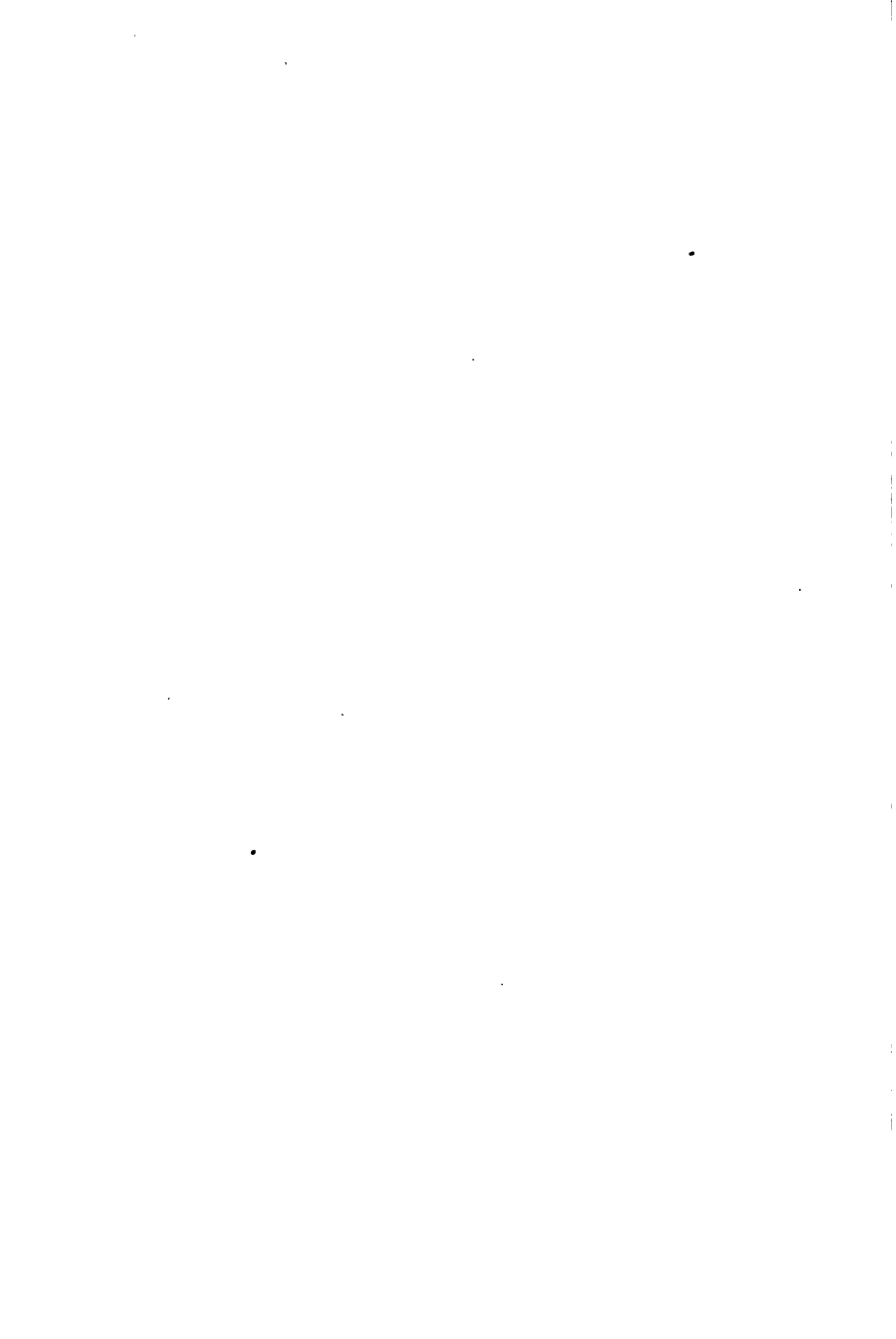
Perhaps the secret of the great hold pets take on the liking of most of us is, that they are so tolerant of our peculiarities, and that they love us, trust us, stick to us through good report and evil report. A breach in the friendship between dog and man must come always from the human side; the dog never casts off his master, betrays him, laughs at him; is no time-server, flatterer, critic. The most suspicious man in the world cannot suspect his dog. He may have made up his mind to say with Pascal: "*La vie humaine n'est qu'une illusion perpetuelle; on ne fait que s'entre-tromper et s'entre-flatter. Personne ne parle de nous en*

notre présence comme il en parle en notre absence. L'union qui est entre les hommes n'est fondée que sur cette mutuelle tromperie; et peu d'amitiés subsisteraient si chacun savait ce que son ami dit de lui lorsqu'il n'y est pas, quoiqu'il en parle alors sincèrement et sans passion;" but he may be very sure that his dog's fawning is true dog-love, and that his loud bark of welcome is not a conventional greeting which would rather be a snarl.

Kindness is not a quality that perishes in the using; and no predilection for pets seems to me either weak or wrong when I remember how very precious are permanence and genuineness of affection, let them spring from what source they may. Have you ever surprised a half sneer on a face that you have begun to look up to as an honest face, or a furtive, cold gleam in eyes that you have fancied kind? If you have, the face has been a human face, the eyes have been the eyes of man or a woman—never of the dumb creature that has shared your cup, and laid its head against your knees, watching you, waiting on you at all times and in all weathers lovingly alike. You put on sables, accept condolences, and wear a countenance of sober depression for unknown, far-away kindred,

though you miss nothing out of your life by their removal ; but when your familiar fireside favourite gives up the ghost you expect no real sympathy, display no outward and visible signs of mourning, though the sense of loss and bereavement is ten-fold greater. Wear a black ribbon for your pet departed, and your acquaintance would pronounce you mad ; omit the regulation depth of crape for the near relation who has been the plague of your life, and the same voices would accuse you of neglecting the proprieties of civilised society. But after all, regret is not measured by the ell-wand if its symbols are ; and the world is aware of it ; aware too that there is so much hollowness under the uniform surface of commonplace existence, that it is wise to keep the woven pretence in good repair, whole and even, if it be only for the credit's sake of humanity.





BY THE FIRESIDE.

" Full knee-deep lies the winter snow,
And the winter winds are wearily sighing ;
Toll ye the church-bell sad and slow,
And tread softly, and speak low,
For the old year lies a-dying."

TENNYSON.



I.

A FORAY INTO THE OLD BALLAD COUNTRY.

IT is a wild day, bitter, winterly ; December has come in lion-like, and is celebrating his arrival with festivities so loud and blusterous, that I have shut my eyes to his rough play, and my ears to his clamour, and am bent on making a Foray into the Old Ballad Country, where there are always sunshine and fine weather for those who love them.

Open Sesame !

Wide open fly the Golden Gates of Romance, and the rich Sheneland stretches away before me into sweet vistas, where the warm-moated air is perfumed with the breath of violets and roses, and floating full of a varied melody,—now loud, now low, now gay, now sad,—the echo of ancient Story told in Song.

The scene is so busy as to be at first quite be-

wildering ; but by and by a little ubiquitous boy, with butterfly-wings, who is hovering over the motley crowds, floats near me, and in him I recognise Dan Cupid himself, Master of the Ceremonies to the Minstrels. He has his quiver at his back, and his bow in his hands, and as he rises and falls on the impalpable purple mists, he sings in his shrill, clear pipe, that sounds sometimes merry and sometimes mocking, but has always an undertone of triumph in it—

“ Over the mountains,
And over the waves,
Under the fountains,
And under the graves ;
Under floods that are deepest,
Which Neptune obey ;
Over rocks that are steepest
Love will find out the way.

“ You may esteem him
A child for his might ;
Or you may deem him
A coward from his flight ;
But if she whom Love doth honour,
Be concealed from the day,
Set a thousand guards upon her,
Love will find out the way.

“ You may train the eagle,
To stoop to your fist ;
Or you may inveigle
The phoenix of the east ;

“ The lioness you may move her,
To give o’er her prey ;
But you’ll never stop a lover,
He will find out his way.”

A crowd of witnesses below testify to the verity of his boast—some with happy smiles, some with bitter, bitter tears. Without let or hindrance I wander through the maze, and see the old tragedies of Love and Death re-enacted before my eyes. Familiar faces meet me, familiar voices greet me amidst the throng. And first, my Lady Grizzell Baillie, twice as bonnie as her lover’s jealous sister, who sundered them, singing in a tone that has far more of a sob in it than of mirth, “ Were na’ my heart licht I wad dee ;” after whom comes the hapless Cromlet chanting his woeful dirge to his false darling. As Cromlet’s ghostly strain dies away with a moan, there resounds through the delicious air a fresh, young, hopeful tongue, that carols forth joyously—

“ Oh ! gin my love were yon red rose,
That grows upon the castle wa’,
And I myself a drap o’ dew
Into her bonnie breist to fa’ !

“ Oh, then, beyond expression blest,
I’d feed on beauty all the night,
Seal’d on her silk-saft faulds to rest,
Till fley’d away by Phœbus’ light !”

With this aspiring swain follows another of the like gallant humour, who would fain make his hay while the sun shines, and is fully aware of the inexpedience of procrastination. Listen to his tender plea—

“ O, mistress mine, where are you roaming ?
Oh, stay and hear ; your true love’s coming,
That can sing both high and low :
Trip no further, pretty sweeting ;
Journeys end in lovers’ meeting,
Every wise man’s son doth know.

“ What is love ? ’tis not hereafter ;
Present mirth hath present laughter ;
What’s to come is still unsure ;
In delay there lies no plenty ;
Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty,
Youth’s a stuff will not endure.”

And next comes the brave Marquis of Montrose, who sings to his dear and only love a song, half homage, half threat ; trolling it out with a sort of gay defiance that—

“ He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all !”

Of his company are Sir Richard Lovelace, flying to the wars, and consoling his sweet for the inconstancy, by telling her that he could not love her so much loved he not honour more ; and sturdy

George Withers refusing to waste in despair for the woman who slights him ; and ardent Thomas Carew, entreating from his mistress more love or more disdain ; and Sir John Suckling, reclaiming his own heart since he cannot win another in exchange ; and Sir Thomas Wyatt, suing only for liberty ; and the Earl of Surrey, extolling his fair ladye, and bidding all other lovers give place to him ; and Sir Robert Aytoun, refusing to fool his affections away on an inconstant woman ; and Sir George Etherege, warning all those lucky swains who are still free from Cupid's imperial bonds to take heed by him and continue so ; and Sir Charles Sedley, more easily satisfied than his peers, singing with a careless glee—

“ Phillis is my only joy,
Faithless as the winds or seas ;
Sometimes coming, sometimes coy,
Yet she never fails to please.
If with a frown,
I am cast down,
Phillis smiling
And beguiling
Makes me happier than before.

“ Though, alas, too late I find
Nothing can her fancy fix ;
Yet the moment she is kind,
I forgive her all her tricks ;

Which though I see,
I can't get free ;
She deceiving,
I believing,

What need lovers wish for more ?”

Truly, many men, many manners ! For here comes another singer, pleading for that very mediocrity in love that Thomas Carew rejects—

“ Love me little love me long,
Is the burden of my song,
Love that is too hot and strong,
Burneth soon to waste ;

“ Still I would not have thee cold,
Not too backward or too bold,
Love that lasteth till 'tis old,
Fadeth not in haste.

Love me little, love me long,
Is the burden of my song.”

Passing by all these gay gallants, I stray into a beautiful glen, where the woods and the waters mingle sweet music, and white mist wreaths float over the brow of the hills. And here I see wending across the mountains the Lass of Gowrie, bonnie as a rose-bud tinged with a morning shower ; and with her are Highland Mary, Jessie the Flower of Dumblane, Annie Laurie, and that fair flighty Meg, who was deaf as Ailsa Craig to Duncan Gray's wooing—until he was going to leave her. They trip lightly along by the burn and the brae, and

scarcely are their songs out of my ears than I meet poor little orphan Lucy flitting with her all rowed up in her kist. She cries as she goes on her uncheered way, for she is leaving old friends and neighbours, who have been kind to her, and Jamie, whom she loves. "Fare ye weel, Lucy!" sang the birds on the bough, and "Fare ye weel, Lucy!" was all Jamie could say at their parting; and now, poor soul, she is just like a lammie that has lost its mither, her heart is left behind her, and she sees no friend in the future; and so her sad voice dies away in the solemn distance, where soon amongst strangers she will find rest in her grave.

Where the burn runs swiftest lies a pale lassie reproaching nature for rejoicing while her heart is breaking. The roses bloom on the banks, and the birds sing as they sang when she was happy who will be happy never more; for her false love has stolen her rose and left the thorn-sting in her bleeding breast. And not far from her are a weeping pair who have unwisely loved;—what anguish of pleading in the sad voice that moans—

"'Tis vain to comfort me, Willie,
Sair grief must hae its will;
But let me rest upon your breist
To sab an' greet my fill.

“ Let me sit on your knee, Willie,
Let me shed by your hair,
And let me look in the face,
I never shall see mair.”

I cannot bear to hear that loving tongue pleading for remembrance when it is dust, and stopping my ears to its heart-broken cry, I hurry up the glen-side, and in the deep purple heather on the mountain-brow, I wander to and fro until I hear the voice of one forsaken crying in the solitudes for gentle Death. Why should she busk her head, or comb her hair, or make herself any more beautiful. It is not the frost that pinches her, or the snow's inclemency that makes her weep, but that the heart in which she trusted has grown cold to her. She recalls what a sightly pair she and her lover were to see when they rode into Glasgow town—he in black velvet clad and she in cramasie; but now, forlorn and desolate, she crouches on the bleak hill-side, and sighs to the pitiless winds her vain regrets and pathetic lament for the past :—

“ Oh, waly, waly, but love be bonny
A little time while it is new ;
But when it's auld it waxes cauld,
And fades away like the morning dew.
Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
And shake the green-leaves aff the tree ?
O, gentle Death ! when wilt thou come ?
For of my life I am wearie.

“ But had I wist before I kiss'd,
That love had been sae ill to win,
I'd lock'd my heart in a case of gowd,
And pinn'd it wi' a siller pin.
Oh, oh ! if my young babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I myself were dead and gone,
And the green grass growing ower me ! ”

Soon now blows the keen Martinmas wind, and then I meet Barbara Allen. The fading leaves rustle above her fair head as she goes on her way from the town. Downcast is her proud face, fallen her proud lip, while the echo of the dead-bell chimes slowly and slowly over the moor, “ Woe, woe, to Barbara Allen ! ” He is gone whose idle slight she so harshly revenged, and his passing soul seems to wail by her on the shuddering blast. Would she save him *now* were the chance still hers ? Though his life's blood were spilling but a little while ago, she said he should be none the better for her—but *now* ? It is too late—too late. Full of bitter repentance is her soul, full of bitter foreboding, and as she goes in at her mother's door the cry of her remorse breaks forth—“ Since her love died for her to-day she'll die for him to-morrow ! ”

Truly there is much sorrow in the old Ballad-Country, and many sad hearts in Romance-Land,

and much sin, too, and no lack of dark crime and cruel mischief.

Who is this dour young man lurking through the twilight with a gray-headed woman clinging to his arm, and peering into his face with an agony of dread and suspicion, as she asks why he goes so sad, and why his brand drips with blood? He tells her he has killed his good hawk though he had none other than he; but she whispers that hawk's blood was never so red. Then he tells her he has killed his roan steed; but she replies that the steed was old, that he has others in the stall, and that it must be some greater grief that lies so heavily on his soul. At last he confesses that he has killed his *father*, and she asks what penance he will do for his awful crime? He will cross the seas. And what will become of his house and his tower? Let them stand till they fall, he says. And what will become of his wife and his bairns? The world is wide—let them beg for bread. And what will he leave to his mother dear? She shall bear from him the curse of hell who gave him the evil counsel. And so the dark pair steal through the night across the moor, and are lost in a gloom of mystery and wickedness.

Wandering on the haunted slopes, under the rising moon, I am fain to turn my ear hither and thither to listen to a magic music that trills like laughter, now here, now there, on the top of a brier or under a bunch of broom, or out of a tiny heather-bell; but look and listen as I will I can never catch the fairy-folks at their frolics, though I presently hear Robin Good-fellow call out with his mocking "Ho, ho, ho!" as he flies off to some revel rout of mischief. Creeping down into a tangled hollow, I trip on an old tree-root, and stumbling fall; for I have trespassed on fairy-ground. But as I lift myself up I am repaid for my pains by hearing the invisible Elfin Things singing their charmed song, which ripples down the night like an echo of melodious zephyrs—

"Come follow, follow me,
You fairy elves that be :
Which circle on the greene,
Come follow Mab your queene ;
Hand in hand let 's dance around,
For this place is fairye ground.

"On tops of dewie grasse
So nimbly do we passe,
The young and tender stalk
Ne'er bends when we do walk ;
Yet in the morning may be seen,
Where we the night before have been."

I wait for no more lest they should play me some wicked prank, but wend on my way, and for my ill-luck, narrowly escape falling into a witches' meeting. I see the hideous old crones, eleven of them, sitting in a ring, displaying and enumerating their spoils of the day—wolves' hair, mad dogs' foam, adders' ears, a charnel-house skull, the breath of a sleeping babe, the sinew of a murderer hung in chains, screech-owls' eggs, frogs' blood, black cat's brain, bat's wing, toads' eyes, henbane, hemlock, nightshade, moon-wort, adder's tongue and libbard's bane. And as I stealthily hurry away, a shrewish dame joins their company, shrieking aloud—

“ I have brought to help your vows,
Horn'd poppy, cypress boughs,
The fig-tree wild that grows on tombes,
The juice that from the larch-tree comes,
The basiliske's blood, the viper's skin,
And now our orgies let's begin.”

To their fiendish sports I leave them, and wander all through the murky night, unconscious of any fatigue, until the morning-gray begins to glimmer in the east ; then I perceive an ancient mansion nested in a green hollow, with long avenues of forest surrounding it, and drawing near, I see a

lover below one of the windows trilling the strings
of his lute and singing as he trills—

“ Pack clouds away and welcome day,
With night we banish sorrow ;
Sweet air blow soft, mount larks aloft,
To give my love good morrow !
Wings from the wind to please her mind,
Notes from the lark I'll borrow ;
Bird, prune thy wing—nightingale, sing,
To give my love good-morrow !

“ Wake from thy nest, robin red-breast,
Sing birds in every furrow,
And from each hill let music shrill
Give my fair love good-morrow !
Blackbird and thrush in every bush,
Stare, linnet, and cock-sparrow,
You pretty elves amongst yourselves,
Sing my fair love good-morrow !”

A window in one of the garlanded gables opens,
and a sweet face looks out smiling like May ; and
while I am marvelling in my own mind why Love,
who has so tender a sympathy with the brave and
fair, should be called *blind*, an Echo begins to say
quaintly in my memory—

“ Cupid and my Campaspe playd
At cardes for kisses ; Cupid payd ;
He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,
His mother's doves and teams of sparrows,
Loses them too ; then down he throws
The corall of his lippe, the rose

Growing on 's cheek, (but who knows how,)
With these the crystal of his browe,
And then the dimple of his chinne;
All these did my Campaspe winne.
At last he set her both his eyes,
She won and Cupid blinde did rise.
O, Love ! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas ! become of me ?”

As the Echo ends its pretty sonnet, I hear a swain carolling to himself words of wisdom ; a lover of late was he, sighing, sobbing, and crying, alas ! for one who laughed and called him ass. Pair with her that will, says he, with her he will never pair, that cunningly can be coy for being a little fair. A truly sensible resolve ! Cupid's pastime has been for once Love's labour lost, and the shepherd goes on his way, himself again, fancy free and rejoicing. But the blind-eyed little mischief has done his work with cruel effect on this sad soul, who sits amongst the reeds, on the river bank, chanting his doleful strain of “Willow, willow, willow !” A Friar of Orders Gray listens and sighs as though the burden found a response under his own frock, and as he passes on his way there comes flying down the fields a Frantic Lady with Tom o' Bedlam at her heels, and that Mad Puritan who had his education at Emmanuel.

Thankful am I to evade such distracted company,
and to fall in with Fancy and Desire, between
whom ensues this colloquy—

- “Come hither, shepherd swayne,
‘Sir, what do you require?’
I praye thee shew to me thy name,
‘My name is fond Desire.’
- “Where wert thou borne, Desire?
‘In pompe and pryme of May.’
By whom, sweet boy, wert thou begot?
‘By fond Conceit, men say.’
- “Tell me, who was thy nurse?
‘Fresh youth in sugar’d joy.’
What was thy meate and dayly foode?
‘Sad sighes with great annoy.’
- “Doth either time or age
Bring thee unto decaye?
‘No, no, Desire both lives and dies
Ten thousand times a daye.’
- “Then, fond Desire, to thee farewellle,
Thou art no mate for mee;
I should be lothe, methinks to dwelle,
With such a one as thee.”

And so they part company, and Fancy flies up
into the clouds; then suddenly the Golden-Gates
of Romance clang too, and I wake as from a dream
to find myself sitting by the fireside alone, while
all the mad winter winds go shouting and halloo-
ing over the hills!



II.

VOICES AND ECHOES.

CHRISTMAS! How swiftly fly the years,
how quickly the Christmases return—the
years that were once an age in passing,
the Christmases that seemed so very far away!
Yesterday I went to and fro the house, and dressed
it with holly, and made it put on a seasonable face.
I would have all solitaires keep up old observances,
though for voices they may have only echoes, and
for company only remembrance.

The associations of sound are very strange—my eyes are never haunted but my ears are often. Walking to and fro my span of garden in the still summer evenings, I have heard many a time the music of familiar far-away chiming bells. And in my own kitchen—it is the queerest, most unromantic thing—but I have a clock, an ugly American clock, with an ugly Dutch landscape under the

dial, which at every stroke of the pendulum echoes like the parish-bell of the church where we went as children, ringing for afternoon service. The first time I heard it the sound quite startled me. I was waiting for tidings from home, the window was open, and the deep stillness of an August evening was in the air and on the fields. I said to Dinah, "Listen—I hear a bell tolling a long way off." "It's in the clock," said she. It *was* in the clock; but I have only to stand hushed and musing for a few minutes on the hearth, and the monotonous echo of the pendulum resolves itself into the measured, rhythmical tolling of the bell at St Michael's.

If I were at home—in the old home that is no more—I should have been awakened in the dead of last night by the Waits going about the streets making their dreary music, or perhaps by a troop of shrill carol-singers braving the frost and cold for Christ and ancient customs' sake. It is a picturesque and kindly custom, and I miss it; for the quiet folks of this south-country village rest in their beds, and only the wild north-west wind rolling up and dashing sonorously against my cottage wall, like waves of a heavy sea, gives warning

through the advent-month that the great Christmas Festival is fast coming round again to mark off another year from the life-lease of each one of us.

Has it ever happened to you to hear music in Church—old Christmas and Easter Hymns—that brought back long-ago times when you were a child—that set your throat aching, and filled your eyes with reluctant tears? Dwelling amongst strangers in a strange place, have you ever been floated on the familiar air of psalm, or chant, or anthem, within the gray walls of some other God's house, where once you and all of yours—father, mother, brothers, sisters—were wont to be gathered together ; and has it come over you at such a time that such gatherings can be nevermore, *nevermore*. So it befell me to-day. The green garlands were everywhere ; swung up the roof, and round the lamps ; twined into words of heavenly promise above the altar, and wreathed into bands about the monuments—a festival in festive guise it was ; but oh ! how my heart swelled with remembrance when the organ burst forth, and the children of the choir sang loud and shrill, “ Peace upon earth, and unto men good-will.”

I turned my face to the wall ; the quaint, irregular little village church vanished. I was standing on a hassock in the high-panelled pew at St Michael's beside my mother. My imagination wandered again into the mystical, moated sunshine of the clerestory ; my ears resounded once more with the full joyous harmony in the gallery overhead, where a hundred singers in blue and gray lurked invisible. Tuneful angels there, but in the street, droll stiff images of children marching with a military precision ; the boys in complete corduroy and muffin caps, the girls in stuff frocks, scuttle bonnets and woollen mittens, drawn up to their purple elbows like stockings docked of their feet. Wonderful music in church, wonderful Christmases of childhood, whose sweet old echoes ring soft and solemn through the many years from Then till Now !

I had made up my mind before the day came that I would try to keep Christmas cheerfully, and had asked a dear little bird of passage to join her solitude with mine in that intent. Some young creatures make friends with their elders at once, and my little bird was one of them. In the twilight

she sang me a sweet Scotch ballad about somebody's heart where there was "Nae room for twa, ye ken, nae room for twa;" and having finished it, she came and nestled down on the rug at my feet, drew my hand round her neck, and caressed it absently and sighing. Thinks I to myself—This little bird is lonely. It is winter; there is neither bud nor berry on the trees—but Spring will come. And then by the fire we fell to talking of many things, and last of the great Civil War amongst our kinsfolk in the West; and the pleasant song-voice dropt into a plaint, then thrilled indignant, then sank again soundless for one low-lying in the red swamp of a famous battle-field far, far away. Oh, Christmas, Christmas, that brothers' blood should be flowing like water while thousands and tens of thousands are singing in Church, "Peace upon earth, and unto men good-will!"

Poor little broken-winged bird, so young and to have outlived so much—to have outlived all that seemed worth living for! She thinks so now, but we know what must come after. When the slow grieving down is done, when a trance falls upon pain, when she begins to feel dull and quiet, and to fear that there may arrive a day when she shall

be consoled ; when the grass will be green and the sky blue, and the sun will shine again ; when the terrible bereavement will look as if it belonged to another world—had happened in a former age. While loss is new we dread the comfort of forgetting ; it seems more cruel than any permanence of sorrow ; but by and by we feel it wrong to brood, selfish to cherish a grief that paralyses us heart and hand ; we forgive God that He has wounded us, and begin to pray that we may rise out of our sickness—and we do rise, and are presently healed.

But I do not believe in forgetting—as little do I believe in forgetting as in always grieving. Feeling has its rests and its pauses, but the once deeply felt exists for ever. The place where a real trouble lies hushed will wake up now and then with such a thrilling echo ! You may be sitting by the fireside alone as I am now, or you may be out in the pleasant sun with nothing but hills and fields and heaven around you, or you may be in a mist of faces with music and low laughter, and whispered talk in the air, and suddenly, without warning, out of space suddenly, smites the remembrance of the old pang with a dull physical anguish at the heart,

and all the joy and sweetness of the present are banned away by the shadow of the past.

The sad note of my little wounded bird set me thinking how the story of a life is sometimes told in one unconscious look, sob, sentence. As a narrow chink lets in much light, so a gentle gust may drift aside a veil, and reveal a hidden face—a strange face, perhaps, but one that we never forget if it bear the stamp of a high and suffering humanity. A perplexed soul disburthens itself in idle-sounding sarcasm, and a disappointed heart betrays its emptiness by vague complaints. There is many a text for a Sermon spoken out of Church, and many a key to unlock secrets dropt before subtle guessers at truth, who, peering into the casket, spy old bones and relics gone to dust—to gold dust perhaps—and shut down the lid reverently on the surprised treasure. How such a conclusion was reached—what influence wrought in the production of that prejudice—is often told in a casual word, and a long riddle is straightway unriddled and explained.

This morning in his Sermon the preacher said—illustrating the need we have of heavenly love—

that here also we must have love or life is nothing. He proclaimed it as good Christmas doctrine that we may win honour, reputation, gain ; that we may lose ourselves in folly, or fill ourselves with intellectual toil ; but that without some one to love and to love us the heart yearns, regrets, is empty. He drew out his parallel very clearly and carefully, and the people listened, as they always listen when they hear a truth expounded which they can understand, because it is broad, deep, and simply human. Further, they could trace the illustration home to his own fireside, and see there a happy, kindly wife, and children too young yet to be anything but good and lovable. And the picture was very pretty to behold, independent of the discourse to which it lent its reality and its brightness.

But amongst all those silent people in the pews did it occur to him, I wonder, that 'there must be some to whom God had not given, and never would give, an exclusive love—who would have to pine through life or else to fill themselves with husks, waiting for the better grain laid up in paradise ? There were gray heads and weary eyes lifted up to his kind face, that might, perhaps, have suggested, had he read them at his leisure, how there

are a great multitude of poor and destitute folk to and fro in the world who pick up crumbs of kindness like the dogs under their master's table, but never get a satisfying meal from the first day of their lives to the last.

Human life appears a monotonous series of dull repetitions in the mass, but in detail it is infinitely various. "Every face contains a history or a prophecy," and no two are alike. They may have an air of likeness at the first glance, but in each are lines of diversity more than enough to prevent one ever being mistaken for another when we look again. And as there is difference of feature in every visage, so there is variety of circumstance and variety of suffering in every existence—a long thought this and a bewildering thought, which might check us sometimes when we are ready to apply our own narrow gauge to the more affluent nature of our neighbours; to measure their need by our desire, their fall by our temptation, their penalty by our judgment. A certain devout order of moralists are always prompt to pronounce doom on the hapless poor souls whose feet have stuck fast in the good old grooves of virtue, if they betray that their

thoughts have gone ever so little out of bounds, or that their hearts have fallen into ever so doleful a captivity; whereas, if they hearkened honestly to the echoes of experience from within, perhaps they might learn that they have themselves oftener been saved in their own despite than by their own strength.

Imagine a woman of this sort speaking—a woman who has known sorrow herself, but whose heart it has not softened, whose eyes it has not unsealed. A piteous confession has been made to her, and she answers, with never a doubt of her wisdom, “Your love was wrong from first to last—living or dead, you have no right to think of him.” And the other woman who asked bread of comfort, and has received instead the stone of condemnation, murmurs abashed, “True, oh, true! but it was my fate.”

Through this little rift in the curtain that hangs before some portion of every life, one can look by the eyes of fancy into a drear chamber where a foolish passion has hidden itself, scared at its own unseemliness. In the unhesitating rebuke there breathed that earthy lack of sympathy which for conscience’ sake will not forbear to flash a ghastly

lantern-light on the starved yet living love crouched there in the dark. In the plaintive acquiescence moaned a strain of cynical philosophy, that accepts its lot of anguish as the mysterious gift of an unknown, inscrutable God. Is it pathetic or only grotesquely weak to have wasted love and life on a secret, stolen worship, on a longing that dare not breathe above a whisper, on a dream that death has darkened for ever, and for ever, and for ever? That has left her no right to remember, no right to mourn, no right and no desire to do anything but live on self-condemned, self-pitying, always alone?

She may not here so much as think of him but *otherwhere*? "Love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." If she bear it about with her till she die, will there be no sanctification in heaven for what seemed sin on earth? If she bring it to the high and holy gate, will angels shut her out as the cherisher of a forbidden thing? If she plead with tears, "It has been a thorn in my heart, yet let me keep it!" will they listen, pity, and forgive?

Will a Voice mightier than all bid her be comforted and lay down her *Cross*?

Many an unchristened changeling that the world has not owned may perchance find succour and acceptance at the threshold of Everlasting Mercy. Deep, deep and wide must Lethe flow through the Valley of the Shadow of Death if no Echoes of sweet sorrow and guiltless sin can follow the weak and unhappy to the Resting-place of the weary!





III.

UNKNOWN, YET WELL KNOWN.

ONE Sunday morning nearly nine years ago a little girl came into my school-room, wearing a very grave face, and said : "I am sure you will be sorry—Curren Bell is dead." The bells were going for church ; it was a bright, bright April day. I looked out at the sky, blue against the blue hills, at the river winding broad and sunny through the dale. Dead—was she *dead*—and all so fair and silvery ? A week ago—on the last night of March ;—there was the brief story in the newspaper—would I read it ?

It had been a cherished hope of mine one day to see her. In that quiet corner of the world we were out of the way of rumour ; I do not remember that I had ever heard her name, or what manner of woman she was in the face ; but I knew her books, in which she had written out her whole heart and

soul, and the tidings of her death touched me as sharply as if she had been a near and dear friend. It got into the music at church—She is dead—Curren Bell is dead—ringing over and over. And at noon to and fro the holly-walk looking towards Middleham, gray and ancient in its sunny parks, backed by sweeping moors such as she loved, and black fir-woods such as she gloried in, I could think of her only; vaguely speculating on that life which now we all know so well.

And to-night I heard again the tolling-bell for one unknown yet well-known, just as I heard it on that glad April morning long ago. I had drawn up my little stand with the candle on it into convenient proximity to the hearth, and had looked for some minutes with a lazy sense of comfort at Cosy asleep in a white ball by the fender; and then a little longer I had listened to the keen east wind, and gazed at the sky through the window above the fire, where between two purple black clouds peered out a wan glimpse of the moon. The *Times* lay under my hand waiting to be read, and at length I opened it, when straightway my eyes fell on the announcement of the "Death of Mr Thackeray." Dinah was in the room clearing

away the tea: "Oh, Dinah," I said, "Mr Thackeray is dead."—"It's what we must all come to, little an' big—an' there'll be no more o' his i' th' magazine?" was her response—for Dinah reads the tales and discriminates, and delivers herself of shrewd criticisms often; and her first thought was her loss in that promised novel cut short at the fourth number—perhaps mine was too.

I don't know when I made up my mind that Mr Thackeray was of all Story-tellers the truest and tenderest. How often can one follow the loves and troubles of Henry Esmond, the sorrows of Amelia, the trials of Colonel Newcome? I cried over *his* death until I made myself such a fright I could not go to a tea-party, and did not care for missing it either. I do not believe any book could ever give me the same sort of sensation again—the same impression of unutterable sadness, of yearning, faithful, unavailing love.

I always feel the same interest in his "puppets" as I do in living men and women. Once when I was in London I set forth alone, with plain directions how and where to find the lodgings of some friends. On my way I saw painted up at a corner, "Newman Street," where Becky Sharpe abode in

her childhood, and I must needs diverge to look at it. I forget in what order the others came, but I espied Wells Street, and Bittlestone Street, and Clipstone Street, where the drawing-school was; and I went wandering up and down, and in and out, and round about until I did not know in the least where I was. But it was a sunny morning, and it did not matter. Some of these dingy streets were as dull and deserted as the streets of an old provincial town. At last I came to one where there was frowsy furniture out of doors, and an attractive bird-shop with a great brindled cat sitting harmless and watchful amongst the cages; and while I was contemplating this remarkable arrangement a slip-shod woman looked out at the door, of whom I asked my way back to the point from which I had strayed. She was as explicit as possible, but I never found it—houses have no physiognomy like trees and hills and country roads, they are just masks; ugly and monotonously alike; and after spending all my morning, and half tiring myself to death, I finally went home in a cab without accomplishing the object of my expedition at all. But I had done better—I had discovered the scenes of immortal pictures; and when I behold

them now the atmosphere of faded gentility and the background of decayed splendour are vividly presented to my eyes.

"The Curate's Walk"—who can read "The Curate's Walk," and not feel that he was a good and true man who wrote it? There is a wondering simplicity in it—a pathetic confession from first to last that his half of the world does not know how the other half lives. He offends us by no grotesque foreshortening of the figures, melts us by no sentimental exaggeration of their misery, but shews to us a picture of the very poor, weak, and unlucky, viewed through the misty spectacles of a tender-hearted humorist, and sketched with the ready touch of a master.

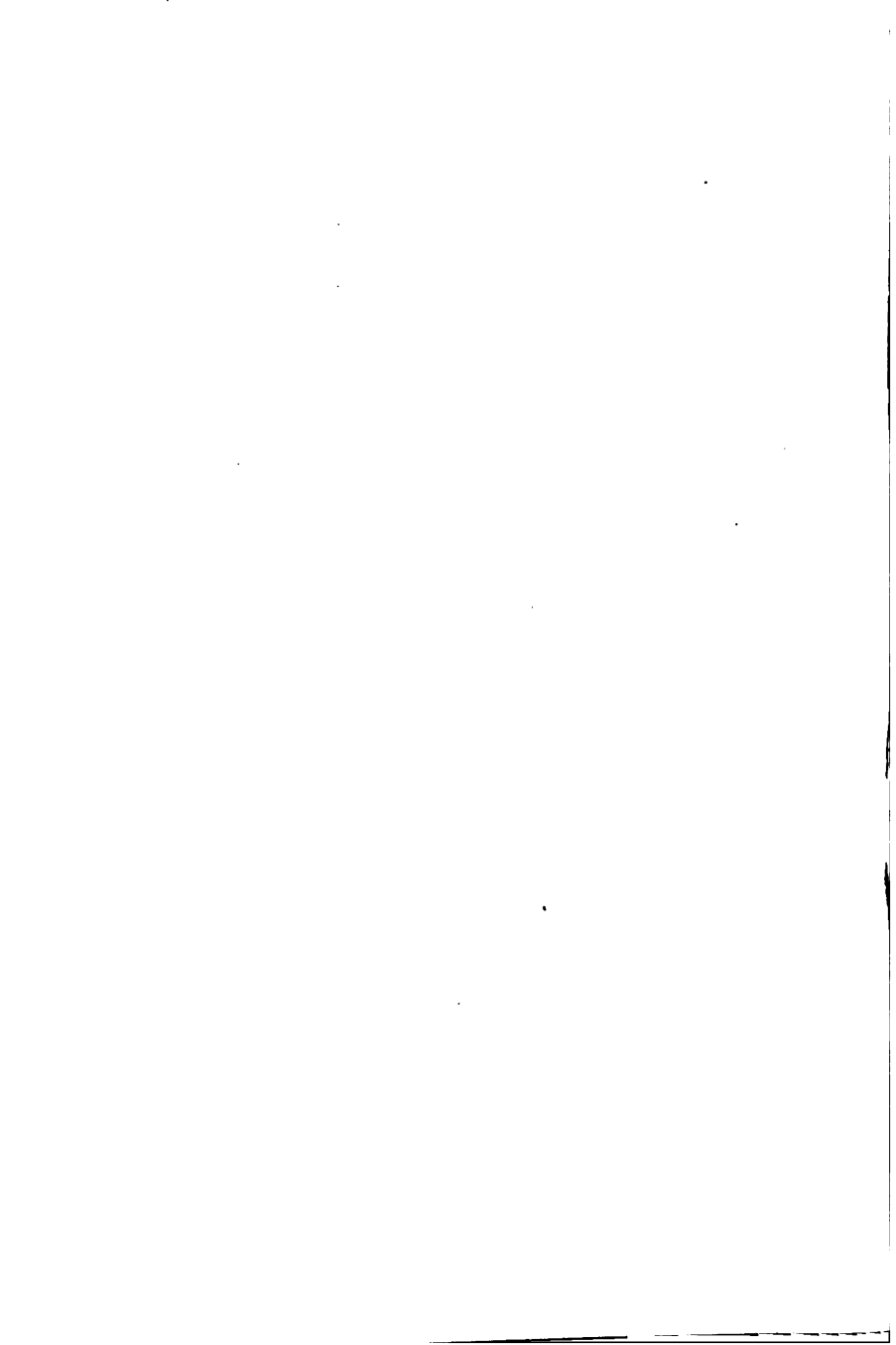
When I had pondered a little while over his death, I reached the volume down from its shelf, and read "The Curate's Walk." Perhaps no writer ever went to his grave more honoured or more loved by those who never saw his face than he who wrote that brief and kindly story.



WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

“ Partir avant le jour, à tâtons, sans voir goutte,
Sans songer seulement à demander sa route,
Aller de chute en chute, et, se traînant ainsi,
Faire un tiers du chemin jusqu'à près de midi ;
Voir sur sa tête alors s'amasser les nuages,
Dans un sable mouvant précipiter ses pas,
Courir, en essuyant orages sur orages,
Vers un but incertain, où l'on n'arrive pas ;
Detrompé, vers le soir, chercher une retraite,
Arriver haletant, se coucher, s'endormir,
On appelle cela naître, vivre, et mourir :
La volonté de Dieu soit faite ! ”

FLORIAN.





I.

OF SOME WORKING WOMEN.

HONCE heard a devoted woman, on whom had fallen the charge of several children not her own, say, earnestly and strongly, that she should keep the girls always with her if they remained unmarried, though she might have only bread and cheese to give them. Perhaps it was wisely felt both for her and for them. It appears best and safest for the women of a family to cling together if they can—and if they cannot, it is because God wills that they shall not. He never deals two lots precisely similar, and in thousands of cases Death, the dispenser, or Necessity, the inevitable goad, loosens the household bond. Heaven gives to each her billet, and forth into the wide world she goes. The elder first, and then the younger. Time runs on; meetings are few and far between; a single day in half-a-dozen years, a

week, perhaps a happy month. *All* together again it may be never—or, if ever, changed. Sisters, yet half strangers. With different interests, different friends; with the tone and prejudices of other society. And when the old home, the old centre is broken up, partings become longer and longer. They may console themselves with anticipating a re-union when they are worked out, a brief rest from their labours in company when they can labour no longer; but life begins to wane low and blank when they look forward to only that, and they must have learnt, by the collapse of many a nearer and dearer hope, that it is little worth their while to look forward beyond the day.

No philosophy commends itself less to my liking than the *cui bono* philosophy, either to begin or end with. The most urgent spur of business leaves us with a truer capacity for enjoyment than any one feels journeying wearily through life with that slack rein. The harshest and narrowest limits of necessity enclose more helps to common happiness than range over the blank expanse of a desultory, aimless existence. I have learnt to think that work is a good thing and a pleasant thing taken by itself, even for women: work at home, if it is

there for them; work abroad, if it is not. There are thousands with minds too active, hands too busy, souls too restless to sit down before a prolonged diet of bread and cheese with all the accompaniments that bread and cheese imply; and such had better be governesses in very hard places than sink into mental and moral dyspepsia on that monotonous fare.

To guide a house and bring up children dutifully and honourably has always been considered a sufficiently high and ample task to fill the capacity and exercise the strength of the most robust and clever wives; and so few prove equal to it in the long run, that a large and increasing number of spinsters must submit to be irked with a sort of collateral maternity in training up the families the matrons bear—and in truth it appears the most natural and wholesome worry that can devolve upon them. I love children myself as much as it is possible for a woman to love creatures in whom she has neither property nor possession—for devotion one must have a holdfast not liable to break away at a brief warning. I know in myself that narrowness of heart that never opens itself entirely to what is not its own—that never puts forth its

strength save for those that have a right to claim it, and what is in me is in my sex generally. I cannot reason except from feeling, but feeling is not always illogical, is it? though it may be a roundabout way of getting at a subject. Still if the subject be worth getting at at all, it is worth going round about, and worth viewing in a natural and not in an abstract fashion. My own experience did not lead me to the conclusion that the life of a governess need be of itself either unhappy or irksome. Few perhaps would adopt it voluntarily, but those whom Heaven does not permit to choose must take what is given them. "If they can't get crumb they must eat crust," and wise are they who can discern flavour in this crust and be thankful. The very hardest is better than no bread at all, which might be the alternative of many did they reject it.

Success in our work is a matter of personal capacity, and gifts and graces are sheer naught without energy to back them. We all of us observe most closely those who are travelling in our own groove, and while it is new there is interest enough to lighten the laborious way. I remember some of my companions who loathed their march, yet

still trudged on with downward gaze and stolid perseverance; others who trailed listless feet and limp garments through sloughs of despond; others who had mistaken their vocation altogether, and were lost in a querulous perplexity, which vexed and bewildered all within earshot of them. I do not mind confessing now that I found the prospect along the road encumbered with these helpless and spiritless beings often very discouraging, and that sometimes my heart was like to fail and make me as one of them. The first years are not the worst—it is when we begin to feel the drag, we rebel—when we see our faces fading, and our eyes growing dull poring for ever over the alphabet. Those are not the luckiest who escape a sharp passage of personal distress; for after pain comes weakness, love of quietness, then patience and fitness for tedious, steady work. We acquiesce in fate's assurance that for us—as for others—there is much to be foregone and much to be borne. All day labour, perhaps unlightened by love, and endurance with other folks' children instead of joy over one's own; and at night a silent room for rest, and a solitary shadow for company.

This outline of an existence is, I know, common

to the youthful experience of very many women ; but I believe it to be planned by the Omniscience that metes out all happiness and all sacrifice, and to some extent we are suffered to clothe and garnish it as we will. I clothed and garnished mine with every little weed of pleasure that I could lawfully gather, and if it was never very glad nor very gay, neither was it ever a gaunt bare skeleton of discontent. I liked teaching, but it was hard to reconcile myself to the chill isolation of living in other people's houses ; nevertheless, as the stubbornest spirit must bow to strong necessity, I did my duty to the best of my power, and for ten long years warmed myself at strange fires, which term of experience was sufficient to convince me that a governess's position is very much what she chooses to make it. I soon realised the restraint she must be,—always in the family and never of it,—and then I stipulated for permission to keep my own quarters, where I created a sort of dumb home-circle, which I carried about with me wherever I went,—table, bookcase, desk, flower-vase,—and in whatsoever wilderness I pitched my familiar friends I was straightway at rest. It was a tedious life, but I would not let it be a perpetual grind. We have

a duty to do towards ourselves as well as towards our neighbours, and that duty is to make the best of our lot, and to look as much as we can on the bright side of things.

Since writing the last paragraph I have gone through the painful catalogue of pensioners on the funds of the Governesses' Institution, and I admit that a more dismal exercise for the mind of working woman does not exist. Amongst a hundred examples, I find only four cited who are mentioned expressly as having been trained for their profession, and these four are in no better case than the ninety-six who took to it as a fence against destitution. This is a chapter of facts.

There are degrees amongst governesses as amongst other classes of working people, and nowhere are these degrees more sharply defined than amongst themselves. In the first rank stand the well-educated, able women who address themselves to the business of teaching in a commonsensical fashion ; who are blessed with the mother-wit, the tact, and the prudence which would have made them successful in any line of life ; who have a respect for their vocation, and whose services are worth from fifty to a hundred guineas a year.

In the second rank are those who, under stress of circumstances, must betake themselves to something, and who betake themselves to teaching as the readiest available source of relief. Amongst these are many accomplished gentlewomen fully equal to their work, but who often look upon their work and their position as degrading. This mental attitude tends to lessen their efficiency, and to lessen their money-value in the same ratio. A few overcome this false pride, and, in the end, probably obtain the best appointments and the highest pay of any amongst the striving sisterhood ; but more, it is to be feared, sink by slow decline into utter destitution.

In the third rank are those mixed materials, all useful in their degree, who make up the vast crowd of governesses. Thirty pounds, twenty pounds, ten pounds, or a home without salary, satisfies their modest deserts. With teaching they combine much plain and ornamental sewing ; they lend a hand in domestic emergencies, and perhaps act as nurses every day. They are mostly engaged with the understanding that they will be regarded as members of the family ; and, as a rule, they live with those who by birth and education are their equals,

and no more than their equals. Their comfort and success depend, as in all other walks of life, more upon personal character than upon anything else, and if they have good principles, manners, talents, and industry, they may rise in time to the top of their profession.

In the report of the Institution, which lies before me, the public are informed that governesses cannot *as a body* be provident. Their earnings, it states, are almost always pledged to the maintenance of elder kinsfolk fallen into calamity, or to the arming of younger brothers and sisters for the coming battle of life. This can hardly be gainsaid while that forlorn company of helpless and destitute women stands marshalled here under my eyes, named, numbered, and dated. Nevertheless, it would be more satisfactory if the average amount of their earnings, as a test of past capability, had been appended to the other particulars; for my personal observation has not led me to the grievous conclusion at which the report has arrived. I should have said that *as a body* governesses can afford to be provident, and are provident under ordinary circumstances; but since even Providence does not guarantee any of them against extraordinary ca-

lamities, the charity of the benevolent will always find objects enough to exhaust it; but chiefly amongst that brave band whom age or sickness overtakes still toiling and troubling for others, and amongst those whose scanty wages leave no margin for the exercise of a prudent thrift. But that governesses should appeal or be appealed for, *as a body*, strikes me as neither honourable to themselves nor just to the public.

Independence of spirit raises individuals, and it raises classes no less. By dint of forethought and painstaking, governesses may really do much more for the improvement of their general condition than they have ever yet attempted. Let them not despise the day of small things, nor the result of small efforts. No woman who has once been cast on her own resources needs to be reminded how much better is *very little* than *nothing*. The Post-Office Savings Banks, now established in every town and village, render the laying away of infinitesimal sums possible to the lowest-salaried and hardest-pressed governess in the kingdom. And these infinitesimal sums grow. The habit of sparing grows no less, and for governesses it is a very worthy habit. There are fifteen thousand in Eng-

land, 'tis said, and charity cannot pension one hundredth part of them. But they may each and all, if they will, do something to mediate between themselves and contingent distress, and that is the utmost it is permitted that any self-dependent woman shall do. God may prosper our labours, or He may at any hour afflict us with sudden loss of health, sight, capability, and draft us into that sad crowd of poor and destitute who are to be always in the world for charity to feed. We none of us know. But while youth and strength last we can help ourselves and each other more than we have done.

Cheerfulness is a virtue that is eminently involved in the success of working women ; it is supposed to be a gift of nature and a very rare gift ; but we are most of us born with the germs of it, and if as much pains were spent in cherishing them as in raising other good principles, cheerfulness might by and by become as general amongst us as truth, honesty, prudence, and other everyday excellences. At present it is not common, and perhaps it is least common amongst those who need it most—amongst women who depend upon

themselves. They are too easily discouraged ; they begin by fancying they have all the world against them ; they shew it a sour dissatisfied face, and it reflects back their own likeness upon themselves. If they would take good heart and accept pleasantly the lot Fortune deals out to them, they would meet kind looks and kind hands on every side, and for the daily walk of their daily duty they would find assuredly that God has not given over helping those who help themselves.





II.

SLEET.

BERIE, dreary, pitiless sleet, coldest, unkindest of weather! weather that calls up dreadful visions of poor souls wrecked at sea, of homeless tramps crawling along deep drenched country lanes, of forlorn starvelings lurking about shelterless in the inhospitable streets of cities. I love the fireside so well myself that I would fain all the world should be warmed and clothed and fed. What terrible stories to read by a comfortable hearth are those in the *Times* headed *Death from Exposure, Death from Starvation*. They make one feel remorseful, guilty—as if there would be blame and condemnation some day for all of us who have had though only a little more than enough, and yet have let Lazarus perish for want of what we could have spared and felt no lack.

It is much easier to see a wrong than to suggest a remedy, but no one can read the *Times* without thinking many sad thoughts, and hoping for some wise and prompt ameliorations of the laws that are too hard and sharp for the bruised spirits of those whom age or misfortune has crushed down into abject penury. I can hardly wonder that the decent poor hate the national lodging provided for them so exceedingly that they would rather die of want than take refuge under its roof. Only to mention the place to Dinah, who knows the working world well, is to bring out on her shrewd old visage a hard, sorrowful, indignant contempt, that testifies to the deep-seated abhorrence with which honest, self-respecting folk regard the system of poor relief.

Historians of future ages will fight furious battles over the authenticity of the nineteenth century chroniclers when they get into the puzzle of our social condition with all its extravagant contrasts. They will squabble over the *Test* by which the admission of a sick wife into the infirmary was refused unless her able-bodied husband and children would submit to be drafted into two other wards of the parish poorhouse as the

misrepresentation of a disingenuous writer who could not enter into the genius of the period he was professing to describe. Whether the natural institution of the family was or was not abolished by law amongst the destitute will become as serious a matter of dispute as the state of the lower people under the Plantagenets or Tudors is now. That the man and wife who had lived fifty years in marriage were divorced at the poorhouse door, and that the little children who went thither clinging to a mother's skirts were taken from her, will be as fiercely asserted and as fiercely denied as any obsolete custom enacted against reason and common sense is amongst ourselves.

Those who live in a village where nobody can be sick, nobody can be sorrowful, nobody can be in need but the whole community knows and tries to help it, must look out into the wider world, with its crowds that cannot be numbered or recognised as units, with intensest pity. It is not much that I have seen of the darkest side of humanity, but one or two faces and one or two places are burnt into my memory past forgetting, and serve me always as vivid illustrations to the over-true tales of poverty, hunger, and

despair, which end in the tragical climax of a coroner's inquest.

Like a chapter from "Alton Locke" was the London lane, turning out of Holborn, down which I was taken one morning a few years ago to look at a splendid church that was being built there for the poor. Sunshine and summer weather were at home that day even in that forlorn quarter, and disporting themselves in undisguised enjoyment about a pump were a multitude of children, bare-headed, bare-footed, all fluttering with rags and unkempt hair, yet careless and merry as flies in a warm window-pane. It took two or three of them to work the handle, and even then the water trickled out reluctantly, but it sparkled as it trickled, and the result seemed to give genuine delight to the small fry who were seated on the stones looking up the spout for its coming. There was a touch of humour in this, a suggestion that the life of the London sparrow is not so very miserable after all; but at the back of the unfinished church we came into a blind alley, where the walls were blackened with the smoke of a hundred murky winters; there the chimneys seemed ready to topple from the wretched roofs, and the

casements hung awry, broken, paintless, patched ; where two faces looked out side by side such as I can imagine haunting the streets of Paris before the red rage of revolution swept over it ; awful faces, wasted with misery, whitened with want, faces that always look out at me again from the *Times* when *Another death from Starvation* darkens its daily reports.

At whose hands will she be required—that girl hardly a woman—who rushed but the other day through the water-gate with her awful appeal to God that she was so hungry, cold, and forlorn in the world, there was no hope and no help for her but in dying ? Was he any man's brother that lay on the stones in the bitter March morning, and before night sank into the wandering dreams of dissolution, and passed away with no record of his tragedy but that he was thirty-two years old, had sought work, had found none, and had perished slowly of famine and of disease famine-bred in the streets of the richest city in Christendom ? At what door lies the guilt of the lingering agony of that poor soul the thread of whose life was worn down to slenderest tenuity by the dole of a shilling

a week and a loaf, until it snapped in the frosty weather and let her go ?

The imagination scarcely dares conceive of the cruel sense of wrong that may have lain on these released prisoners when nearing their extremity. Can you picture that desperate girlish figure flitting along the green river-bank, where perhaps the sunshine danced on the ripples, and only her own shadow lay like a darkness and mystery between the dazzle of the water and the serene blue of the sky ? Her brain reeling, her heart sick, her limbs weary and thin—so weary, so thin ! Why ache, pine, suffer, when the calm flowing of the stream will quiet all and give her rest ? To drown is but a brief pang, and life is so long a misery ! Better die and have done with it, better fling herself into the hands of God, better bring her wretchedness straight to the great Master, Father and Judge of all, than abide any more the repulse and neglect of the harsh overseers of the poor, whose duty it is to administer a law from which every principle of charity has been carefully eliminated. That if it is amiss He will forgive her, is perhaps the last conscious thought which drifts through her shaken mind, and with it the life that was too hard for her

enduring glides dismally away. Let us trust that Mercy pleads for her at the bar of God's Judgment, to which she goes uncalled, with a louder voice than Pity and Goodness, crying to deaf ears and stony hearts, pleaded for her here.

And the man houseless in the night, the bitter, bitter night, the sleety winter night! Think of Death treading on his shadow, keeping pace with him step by step along the silent streets, under the shuttered houses, past the doors closed and barred against his blank and friendless poverty. I can imagine a mournful sarcasm shooting across the warp of his thoughts before they all surged and broke up into mist and confusion as his benumbed limbs failed, and he dropt with the hand of the Angel on his heart. Did he hide in the daylight, that no one saw the seal of hunger on his face until it became the seal of death? Can a man walk about London gaunt with famine, and meet no stray Christian who, for the love of God, will give him a crust of bread? Or are figures like his so frequent in the streets that the people have grown used to the warning spectacle, and pass it by unheeded?

Look into that room where the worn-out woman

who had seen better days, and would not accept the degradation of the workhouse, lay dead with her pittance of parish money and her dole of bread untouched. Piteous sparing, piteous thrift! She could eat but once a day, and little then, to make her allowance last the week, even eked out with bits and sups from a neighbour only one degree less pinched than herself. She must have lain down in the Christmas cold, without fire, without light, without food, when on that last night of her slow-dying the messenger came from heaven with her blessed order of release. Who doubts that he was welcome? I do not.

Of Sisters of Charity the world has no lack in these days, but they go about invisible, disguised from the faint eyes of the poor by the dress of every-day life. Forlorn creatures, suffering hunger of soul and body, may brush skirts with them again and again, and pass by to perish, unfed and unfriended. Would it not be wise if some of them were to go clad in a garb that might make them known at once to the sick and needy as women whose chosen work it is to help and comfort the poor? That frenzied girl might have lifted her

wild eyes to one of them and have been saved; that man out of work might have whispered his miseries in their ear, and have been believed, pitied, succoured; that proud, poor soul starving in her garret might perhaps have vouchsafed to profit by the kindness of a Sister who came to her in the name of the most Merciful.

Do you object that they would be deceived and imposed on? What matter though they be? Are they not much more terribly deceived and imposed on *now*, when men and women can tramp the streets starving, and slip out of the world without anybody knowing their necessity until they are gone? There are givers of tracts to and fro, would it be impossible to have also givers of food? good women with a basket as well as a roll of paper, who would relieve, without question of desert, the sad waifs and strays hungry enough to beg a bit of bread? good women, to whom you or I, were we fallen so low in calamity, might creep up without too agonising a sense of shame, and have our tale heard tenderly, and our great need helped for the sake of Him who helpeth all? It is my belief that many, many more than are ever heard of die lingeringly, out of sight and out of mind, for want of such kindly com-

fort as only religious Sisters of the Poor could give.

I have faith enough in the brotherly-kindness of Englishmen to think that the basket would never be empty for want of pence to replenish it; I even think that the day's gatherings would commonly supply the day's gifts, and that people, to and fro in the streets, whose over-caution shuts their heart against the direct plea of the destitute, would drop an alms into the pouch of the Sisters thankfully. Theirs should be voluntary service rendered for the love of God, and in no ascetic spirit. They should live in the world where they work, and not sever themselves from family and friendly interests. Their means may be little or much, but should be enough at all events for their own maintenance. Those who have no kinsfolk might dwell by twos or threes in a house, or scatter themselves up and down amongst the people to whom they minister. Every village should know its Sisters of the Poor, and every city should count them by tens and by hundreds. The work of the Christian world would bear them, in addition to its armies of pastors and teachers; for those heart-breaking Tales of the

Times prove that there are not yet servants enough for all, or nearly all, there is to do.

Why don't I put on a carmelite gown, a cloak and hood, and turn out into the sleety weather myself with a basket of broken bread? If I lived in London now I don't think I could help doing it. And I believe many women would walk about the terrible streets with courage and confidence, and do a good work, under the protection of a garb which would make them known to the poor, if the duty of doing it were acknowledged and esteemed honourable; if they might fulfil their allotted hours of labour, and come back to rest amongst the refinements of their own condition, bound by no rigorous discipline, but united in a common object of good-will to the desolate. The dear love of respectability which we cherish is not to be contemned; for we work more cheerfully and thoroughly, and also more effectually, when our vocation is recognised, and backed up by popular opinion. A dress by which the rudest might identify a woman busied in deeds of simple charity would carry her securely and quietly where she might be most needed, yet would never venture to

go without some badge of her mission evident to all; and it would be her own warrant to go where no motive lower than duty would carry any one of us.

I would not have heart and feeling organised out of this service, which is essentially one of pity and mercy. The plea for help should be need of it, and no other; and it should be given with that tender sympathy which goes far to the healing of wounds. They are very, very few amongst the wretched who turn away from practical kindness; and Sisters of the Poor might carry food and comfort amongst those, of all most miserable, who, beaten in the world and dropped out of knowledge of friends, yet retain the forlorn pride of lost estate, shut their door in the face of aid according to law, and perish hungered, neglected, like animals crept into the dark to die.

As the sleet drives keenly over the down, with the wind whistling and wailing as it never whistles and wails except with sleet, I see again that London court where the great church was uprearing itself, and where the sun shone bright at Midsummer; and I think of those two dreary, dreadful faces

looking down from the haggard window. Are they there still in this pinching weather, or have they vanished long ago from the light of earthly day? Did they survive to hear the music in the church finished, or were they gathered to dust before the voices of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving were heard in the wretched lane? And the children that were merry as flies in the June morning, are they springing up into a better and more hopeful life for the neighbourhood of the beautiful God's House, and the homely stone Parsonage where apostolic earnestness, labour, and self-denial must surely have their abode? The mist and the rain and the bitter cold must be there to-day; "a taste of winter in the murky town" such as I can fancy but have never felt. The little flies would shrink and shiver, drop and die, were they out in it; but let us rather picture them gathered warmly in school, learning to work and trust, and to believe that first of all lessons for the Poor, that if some are called in this life to endure and suffer without knowing why, a mighty and merciful God is over all, who will give strength according to their day to every one of His.



III.

AN UNEXPECTED HOLIDAY.

DO you ever wish to be rich? Sometimes I should like to try that novel range of sensations, but at other times, when I see how poor people may be with ten times as much money as myself, I think with Montaigne that ease and indigence depend on each man's opinion, and that indigence is as often found lodged amongst those who have wealth as amongst those who have none. But it must really be very pleasant to be well enough off to give little unexpected holidays—such as I have enjoyed one to-day—to those who cannot often give them to themselves, and pleasant also to have the heart to do it. I wonder how it is the idle world does not more frequently treat itself to the luxury of brightening dull lives, and catching a bit of sunshine from the reflection.

This morning I sat down to my desk with a long

lingering look at the sunshine and the dewy, glittering grass—fine days have been so rare lately. But my work seemed urgent, and except that the sky was blue and had not been blue for a week, I had no excuse to be lazy. Notwithstanding the sleet and biting blasts, the heavy rains and rolling mists, the crocuses still gleam gaily in the borders, and the violets under the windows cluster in sweet profusion. There hang, too, a few red rose-buds on the wall under the verandah, which have weathered the winter, and are fragrant now with the new leaves coming out. There was a good deal of temptation within range of my eye even when I had got my pen in my hand, and a dusty brown book open at a question long since answered, dead and done with, in the chronicles of the 'Middle Ages. There was no help for it—either the blind must come down and shut out the blue scud of the sky, or those ancient worthies must be left buried for me in the yellow leaves and rusty type of Lord Lyttleton's "*History of Henry II.*," which Doctor Johnson says was elaborated by the searches and deliberations of twenty years, and published with such anxiety as vanity only can dictate. The writer's ambitious accuracy cost him a thousand

pounds—thanks to that ambitious accuracy, whether dictated by vanity or the conscientious desire to put forth no work that was not of his best, it is still excellent reading, though it was rather a shock to my prejudices to find William Rufus described as a man of great qualities, magnanimous as Cæsar.

The blinds came down, and I applied myself to comparing Thierry's charming romance of Thomas à Becket with Lyttleton's cooler and more cautious story, until I grew so interested in their contradictions that the hours sped unobserved, and I had no idea it was past noon until a kind face peeped in at my door and a kind voice said reproachfully: "What a shame to shut out the blessed sunshine—you look like a funeral! Put away your writing, and come out with us for a drive along the Undercliff." For the moment I was inclined to stick to my books, and let the pleasure go, but kind folks are persistent: "Thomas à Becket will keep," said she; "and very likely it will rain to-morrow." And then the south blind was pulled up and the beautiful day let in, and pens, papers, and dusty books were all swept to the right about, and I embraced my holiday gladly, gaily; for, after all, I had done three hours of dry work, which was

enough to appease an irksome conscience, and was only carrying out my pet principle that it is wise to enjoy when a bit of innocent enjoyment is thrown in our way.

And not only is it wise, but it is our duty. It requires an effort to keep ourselves up to caring about little pleasures when we are fairly launched into the silver age. It seems so often not worth while to do this or that, or to go here or there. It was all very well when we were young; then everything was new and bright and golden; but now our best hopes are buried and shapeless with overgrowth of moss, and the long galleries of our foolish, faded day-dreams are all festooned with cobwebs; we are slow and sleepy, and the dust may gather and thicken as it will on the realities that are left; for they are all dull, monotonous, and tiresome, and nothing is worth anything but work—and *that* is vanity. This humour is very insidious in its growth and very deceptive in its appearance, and I believe we may let it spread until it binds us hand and foot, heart and spirit; until it turns life into a mere languid vegetation like the mildew in damp, forgotten corners of neglected places.

I am fully cognisant of the strength of this

temptation to fold the hands and mope and grow mouldy, but all the world dislikes the accomplished results ; and as, according to the common lot, more than half of life is to come when the golden days are gone, it is really very well worth our while to keep the channels of happiness clear and free, by letting into them sunshine and fresh air, the gentle influences of nature and of friends. And it is a positively delightful experience when you are setting out on a holiday to feel the sense of satisfaction coming over you as keenly as it used to do at twenty or earlier. If you are a self-dependent woman, most likely you were not young at the right time ; perhaps you had the care of children on your shoulders when you were scarcely more than a child yourself ; perhaps you were admonished in the days when nature seemed to claim for you a streak of sunshine on your own account, that it was not becoming of you to dance, to talk, to be pleasant ; to stick a flower in your hair, or go without a sedate muffler up to your chin over your pretty white dress ; perhaps you were secretly vexed and sarcastic, but outwardly sage, sober, and serious ; perhaps you half laughed when you said you must not dance—you were not

there to dance; yet kept your place and let it keep you, and did your duty with persevering propriety until gravity and dulness sat on you like second nature, and some casual observer judiciously remarked what a mortified, overworn face you had, and for the children's sake, wouldn't it be better to send you away and get somebody a little younger and brighter? Be consoled—you will have your joys, though they come rather out of season. I do not believe Heaven leaves any life all in the gray. Mine has certainly been the easiest and most contented since it entered on the silver age, and, please God, I mean to keep it bright. To-day in the sunshine I felt buoyant as ever I did in the "merry, merry days when we were young;" buoyant without afterthought or forethought; appreciating the present pleasure for itself only—which is the truest way of taking pleasure. It is in the accumulated little things of life that its tone consists. The pure lights and dark shadows occupy but a small space in comparison with the tender graduations of colour throughout the picture; and it is the tone that cheers, not the vivid flash.

Don't you think philosophy forms a very grace-

ful drapery for our meditations when the soft outline and sweet lustre of fancy have left them? Stark and ugly grumblings and discontents are like church-yard ghosts—who that can help it would be haunted with them? Golden hair crowned with lilies and roses is the loveliest vision on earth, but there is a modest comeliness too in a kind face faded under gray hairs, and a beauty of good old age that is very fair to see—a beauty of peace and restfulness which is only arrived at through manifold sorrows and disappointments, and the assurance that everything here is but for “a short season.”

The silver age is of all ages the least interesting both from within and from without, but it need no more be blank than a house built in a flat country need be dark. The windows do not command much prospect; perhaps only long, treeless green levels, where nothing can be seen coming from afar, and the best time of day to the watcher is when the shadows lengthen as the sun wanes in the west; but the quiet of it tends to thoughts of a better country, where there is perfect content, no dullness, no weariness, no vague regret. Do not most people dream of Heaven as a place of com-

pensions, where what we have longed for and missed here will be given to us? This world is the theatre of unfulfilled desires, and of desires that, being fulfilled, are always found with some canker in them. The natural expectation of the unsatisfied soul is for a state of things that shall rectify all this. Not without design was our after-home left beyond our present conception ; we only know by faith, and feel through love,—

“God will not leave us in the dust :
Thou madest man, he knows not why ;
He thinks he was not made to die ;
And Thou hast made him : Thou art just.”

The first sweet rush of sunny air as we turned out of the Parsonage-gate into the road was delicious. We had not much talk until we were past the church and over the bridge spanning the ferny ravine, and as for the books that somebody had put into the carriage as a provision against possible dulness, they were never opened. All the way was familiar enough, but when is a fair prospect wearisome? Under the sheltering hedges peeped here and there a primrose amongst the weeds, and the palms were budding downy and gray in the narrow copse. Then came the long

curving ascent of the hill, from which we looked over the shadowy slopes of the fields to the steel-blue sea, with the hollowed cliffs standing out dusky and red against the clear March sky, and the white foam of the tide creeping up on the sands of the bay. The mainland was distinct, and a faint line of smoke trailed across the blue from a vessel far out, while nearer in-shore was a trim little yacht with sails set, and two or three fishers' boats pulling homewards. Winding yet higher under the steep wooded shelves of the down, we looked back on the village, more open now than in the time of green leaves ; and across the lowlands beyond it to Brading Haven, lying lake-like between the hills. The white Culvers were warmly tinged with sun shining through thin haze, and over all—hill, valley, firwood, heath, village, and sea—moved the tender shadows of clouds drifting slowly before the wind.

The next bend of the way carried us out of sight of home, and revealed a beautiful cup-shaped glen, with great old ash-trees sweeping their low branches down the hill-side to where the clustered roofs of a farmstead nestled in the quiet hollow. Then the road passed into a cold shade close

under the down, and lingered along it until another curve brought it back suddenly into the sun; and with that we began to descend and descend, by single cottages, by cottages in groups, by pleasant houses and ivied walls, by a church looking over the tree-tops to the sea, by a silent village-street, and a town-street all astir with afternoon life, and so into the narrow, warm, picturesque lanes of the Undercliff.

It was like entering on another climate, so soft, so genial, so balmy was the air. I looked for leaves on the trees, but there were none except the faithful greenness of ivy, and of now and then an alder-bush putting forth its early foliage amongst the dark purple of the naked thorns. The wall of cliffs, rent and riven, channelled with rain, fretted with decaying frost, towers towards heaven through five miles of scenery wilder and lovelier than the imagination unhelped could conceive of. One day those rocks must have stood raw and haggard in their new destruction, but now Time and Nature have wrought about them so tenderly that out of ruin has come the very perfection of beauty. There is no outline so harsh but the lichens clothe and richly colour it, no steep so rugged but the

long tendrils of ivy clasp and cling to it. About the strewn wreck below creep the mosses everywhere, and in the time of flowers the eye has its desire of them.

There is a cheerfulness of running brooks in the Undercliff, as well as the grand, grave serenity of the sea. It is pleasant to hear the low carol of the tiny waters as they go winding on their short-lived way. What a fairy-fate is theirs! Bubbling up from ferny knolls, curving out beneath tangled arches of bramble and traveller's joy, then whispering amongst the mosses and primroses in shady places, then flashing forth into the open glades where the blue hyacinths and meadow-cowslips grow—all their little course a single day of beauty and for an end the rushing welcome of the tide upon the sands. If the waters talk to one another when they meet, what a pretty story some of these must tell—a story like innocent blissful childhood, never grown up to sorrow or sin.

Amongst the tall trees the white smoke creeps from frequent roofs of houses, and between them lie lovely glimpses of gardens where to-day only delicate clusters of snowdrops sprinkled the turf, and daffodils airily tossing their heads in the

gentle breeze. The thatched stone cottages all wreathed about with trailing plants, look picturesque and home-like, standing in twos and threes amongst the bushes and boulders ; and the children's faces are placid and ruminative. They gazed up at us from the steps of the open doors as we passed, with large, grave eyes ; they have soft rosy cheeks and calm open countenances—the blessings of a quiet life not pressed upon from without by poverty and hardship. They are somewhat like the little laughing brooks where they play ; and whether they loiter always in and out and round about the wild sweet diversities of their birthplace, or make their way over-land and over-sea “to fresh fields and pastures new,” the sentiment of beauty will be theirs for ever, and no dullness of city, or bleakness of moor, or desolation of strange country can rob them of the memory of *home* in the Undercliff. To have spent a happy, easy youth amongst fair scenery is a possession to enrich the heart with pleasant, kindly thankful thoughts,—a treasure to be treasured all life through.

How much poorer is our talk than our feeling—

most of us are but half articulate. A few words with sympathy go further than volumes uttered to a dull heart and negligent ear. There is no recreation more refreshing than the exchange of thought and fancy by the way between friends who have a common ground of simple tastes to start from, and peculiarities or opposites of experience and occupation to colour them. It is circumstances that give all of us our medium to look through, and often our point of view as well.

One against whom sentence of death has been not only recorded but reiterated in the warning pains of many a weary day, would see in this bright landscape a faint foreshadowing of the Land of Beulah, and so her gentle speech would steal upon the ear, and caress and soothe the mind into a dreamy half-saddened mood of abstraction. Presently another would chime in with reminiscences of other places which this called to remembrance, and would decline gradually on the adventures of foreign travel until some trivial, absurd incident produced a laugh all round. Then the sage of the party would be wise, and improve the hour by telling us how all this upsetting of the Undercliff came about ; how through the wear and

tear of ages, by the action of wave and wind, of rain and frost, the great cliffs parted, and crashed and crumbled down, and lay in ragged heaps until the winter and the spring, the summer and the autumn of pre-historic days were come and gone, and come and gone again, and the wilderness of rock was transformed into a wilderness of beauty; and the wild Celt built his hut in the hollow, and raised his grave on the hill, and lived and died and was forgotten; until Doctor Dryasdust began to potter in the past, and dig up bones that were bones of living men eighteen hundred years ago, and to lay bare foundations of houses, fallen roof-tree and walls, vanished out of sight and out of mind, centuries before the ancestors of the present lords of the soil came in. He would discourse to us of how Celt, Roman, Saxon, Norman—pagan, monk, puritan, had set each his mark on the land and disappeared; and would perhaps warn us that we also must disappear, leaving relics of our work for generations yet unborn to wonder over and be amused—but very poor relics in comparison with those who have gone before us. Then another, whose interest lies chiefly in the doings and sufferings of the world that is, would scan new-

risen walls, and wish perhaps that such quiet, beautiful seclusions might remain quiet and beautiful always ; that toilers and spinsters, jaded and overworn with tedious work, might come out from their busy noisy hives, and learn and see how good God is in country places, and how all the labours of His hands praise and glorify Him for ever. And so from the sympathy for humanity, struggling, suffering, trusting here, might come talk of the peace and blessedness and fulfilment for which we wait ; and that something in us, stronger than reason, deeper than feeling, higher than thought, that seed of the immortal which we call the soul, would break for a little while out of the bonds of the flesh, and look in the patience of hope to the far off Easter-land where it shall grow into perfect life—free and redeemed for ever.





IV.

LAST WORDS.

MY serious book is done.

When its first chapter was written, there were some happy, bright-faced children who used to come frequently in and out of my cottage with wonderful questions of fairies and gnomes and ogres, and who looked up with solemn, wide-eyed, half-incredulous speculation, when I protested they were all true—in Elfin-Land. Yesterday, as I was winding up these, my little moralities, they came again—ever so much grown; boys almost too tall to be kissed, a pretty fair maid, rising out of roundabout, rosy-posyhood into slim girlishness, and still their eager question was, “Is it true? Is it true?” except of one, who is graduating in grammar, and took away my breath by inquiring, “Is it founded on *fact*?” “Everything is true—everything is founded on fact,”

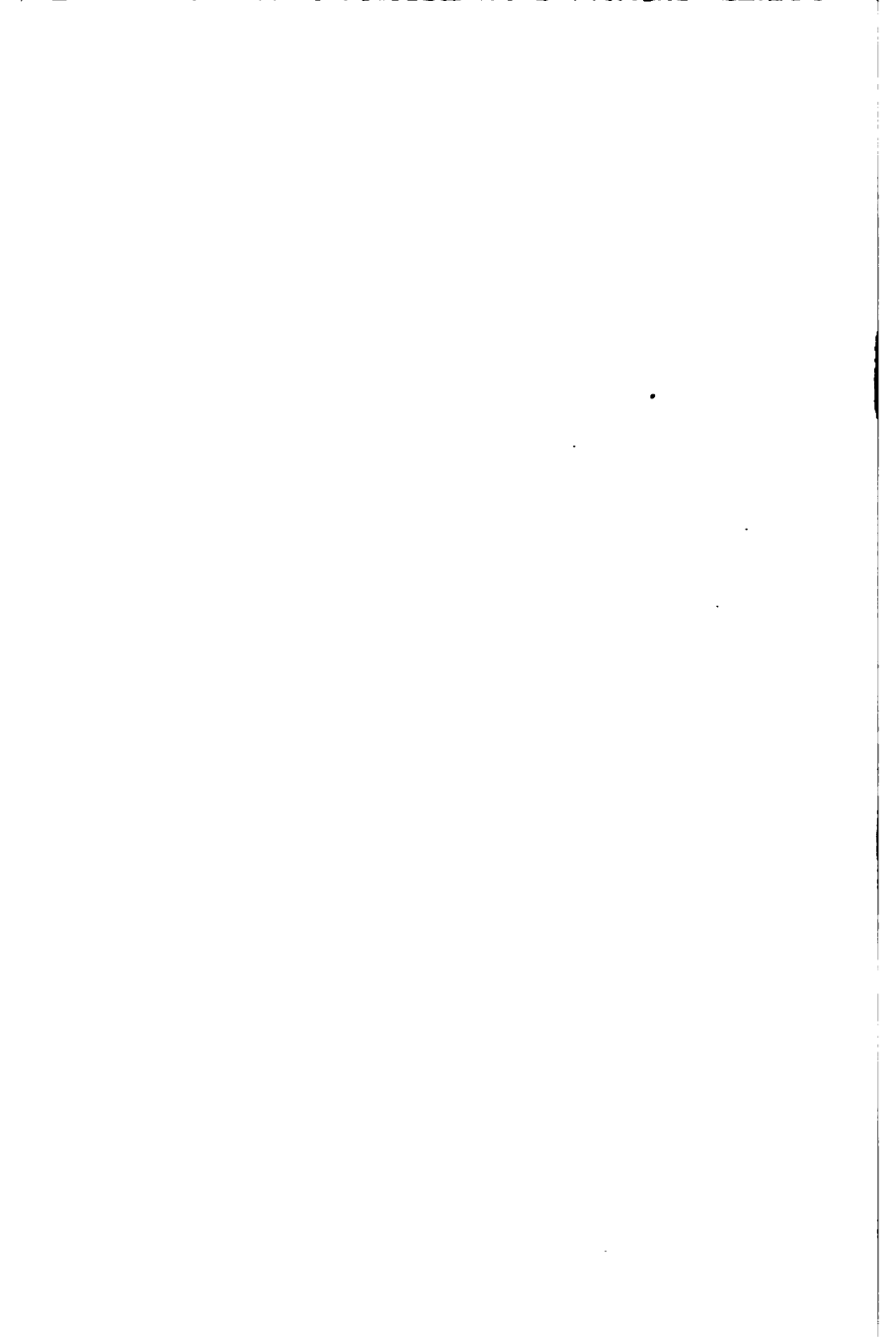
said I; "and was there ever such glorious May-weather?"

There were some grave thoughts in my mind for an ending when the children appeared, but somehow they scattered them; and as thoughts are winged, capricious creatures, I have not since been able to lure them back. Let them go. Need a book of dispersed meditations end gravely? According to the fitness of things, one would say *Yes*. But is not life within, as well as life without, a strange, inconsistent, cameleon-visaged business? Who can answer for the mood of to-morrow? Who knows whether we shall be traversing a broad plat of monotony, or going through a deep-brooding glen, or climbing a hard ascent into light and fresh air, or "sitting down by the way-side weary" and putting our burden off? The hill-side may lie dark in shadow, but its crest looketh up to heaven; the road may be long, but it is ever winding, and bits of good cheer flash across its dulness continually.

The sun shines here to-day. There is an animated chirping amongst the laurels; a beautiful song-thrush hops to and fro the gravel in quest

of the crumbs that earlier birds picked up ; the cuckoo is calling in the lane, the roses are out, the hedges are white with May. And so amidst spring peace and spring pleasantness, with gratitude to God who has made the world so fair, I shall end these idle essays of the Silver Age.

THE END.



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HARRIET PARR.

In this work the object is to give such a clear and connected HISTORY OF ENGLAND, from the ages of tradition to the present time, as may be acceptable to young people. As it is designed for instruction, it will aspire rather to justness and accuracy than to popularity of style. For the better understanding of the narrative, the writer will attempt to trace in distinct outline the rise and progress of law and freedom, and the gradual corruption and restoration of religious belief, which have hitherto been passed over lightly in school-books, as matters too hard or too dull for the comprehension of children. But children of average mind are more patient of a little tediousness than of an imperfect explanation; and the framework which keeps the story in due shape and perspective, enhances the effect of its life and colour. The writer does not therefore think it expedient to omit always what is dry or difficult, nor will she adopt the familiar, childish, condescending method; being convinced that the best English any writer can use is best liked by young readers. The main purpose of her History will be to give them honest views, as far as they go, and to teach them nothing that must be afterwards unlearned.

The Publishers believe that this History will supply a want long felt by teachers and heads of schools.

